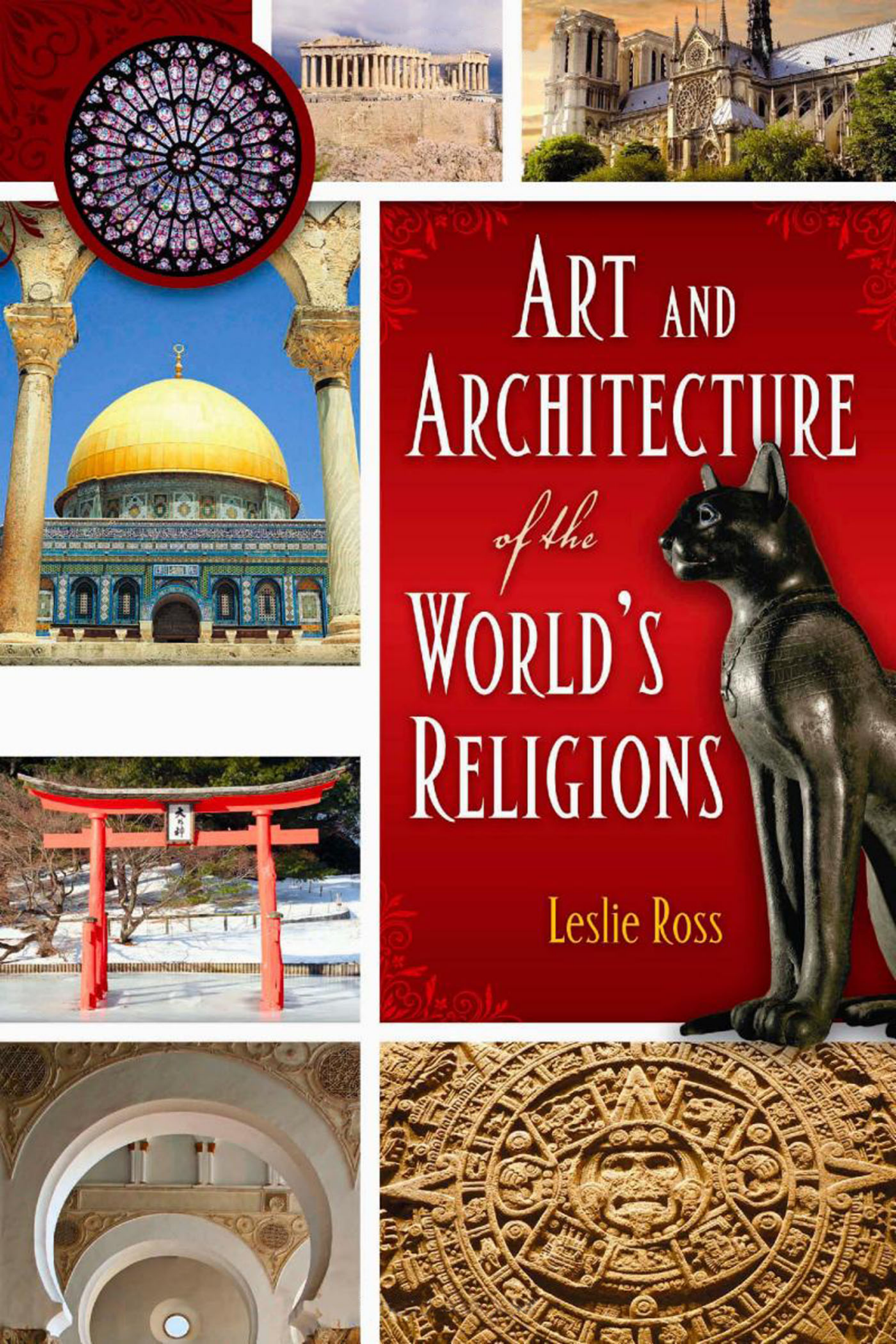


Art and Architecture of the World's Religions
Leslie Ross

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To my parents

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Many colleagues, friends, and acquaintances have, during the two to three years since these volumes have been in preparation, expressed either great sympathy or total disbelief about this project. How could one possibly even begin to think about composing a book or two dealing with such a large topic as the art and architecture of the world's religions? This is a question I have regularly asked myself too. And, in reply to queries about how long I have been working on this book, I have simply had to say that I have been working on this study, in some form, for *many* decades now.

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Introduction

A friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty.
—Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, September 2, 1926

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

This book is designed to provide an introduction to the major religions of the world, with special focus on the art and architectural forms associated with these belief systems. The study is divided into two volumes with a total of 16 chapters. Each chapter concentrates on a major world religion and includes sections on: (1) the origins and development of the religion, (2) the principal beliefs and key practices, (3) the traditional art and architectural forms, and (4) selected and illustrated examples of art and architecture.

The religions covered in these volumes include belief systems of very ancient origin as well as religions whose development is, relatively speaking, more modern. Some of the ancient religions discussed in these volumes are not currently practiced today in their original form. The evidence for these ancient belief systems is primarily archaeological, art historical, or textual. The reader will thus find information on prehistoric belief systems, ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and classical Greek and Roman religions in volume 1. Religions that continue to be practiced today in various forms, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are covered primarily in volume 2. The reader will also find chapters on the indigenous belief systems of Africa, Oceania, Australia, and the Native Americas in volume 1, and discussions of Shintoism, Taoism, and Confucianism in volume 2.


Arctic
Ocean
North
America
Europe
Africa
Atlantic
Ocean
Pacific
Ocean
South
America
Antarctica

World map.


Asia
Middle East
Pacific Ocean
Indian Ocean
Australia

Of necessity, even given the scope of these volumes, readers will doubtless find that several world religions as well as several regions of the world are not included in this study. A full and completely comprehensive coverage of all of the world's religions and the religious art and architectural forms associated with all geographic regions of the globe would require a far greater number of volumes. Such comprehensive coverage is not the goal of this present study. These two volumes are simply designed to present an introduction to the richness, vastness, and diversity of this material, with the hope that readers will be encouraged and inspired to delve further. It is assumed that readers will recognize that the materials presented in these volumes represent carefully selected examples of the religious art and architecture traditionally associated with a diversity of faith traditions and practices. Readers are encouraged to understand that any gaps they may perceive in the coverage of world religions or world regions in these volumes are not intended to either maximize or diminish the status and importance of any world religions or regions.

Further details and suggestions about how to use this book most effectively are found at the end of this introduction. In the interim, some definitions will usefully serve to explain the goals and parameters of this study. Before proceeding further, it will be helpful to define what we mean by "religion" and what we mean by "religious art and architecture."

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Religion can be (and has been) defined in many different ways. Religion can be seen as the inherent human impulse to seek meaning in life and death, to develop and maintain a relationship with the transcendent, to explain or justify why certain things happen in life, to connect or communicate with higher and nonhuman forces, to receive guidance on correct attitudes and ethical behaviors, and to provide and promote community among cultural groups. All of these factors have played significant roles, to a greater or lesser extent, in the development, promulgation, rise, and transformation of the world's religions. The questions traditionally posed by humans, and diversely answered by the world's religions, address the same issues and concerns.

> Is there something "greater than us" that we identify as deity? If there is, who or what is this divine entity? . . . What is the nature of the world and the heavens? Did they emanate from the divine, were they created by the divine, or are they unrelated to anything divine? . . . What is humanity's place both within the world and in relation to the divine? . . . What does the divine expect or demand of us? What actions are good, and what actions are bad? Is there life beyond death? If there is, how is it gained or received? What will it be like? Where will it happen? How shall we get there?[1]

These are some of the fundamental questions that are addressed by the world's religions and to which these religions have responded in diverse ways. Of course,

it should be noted that many scholarly and popular studies have been devoted to the question-asking process itself—why, where, when, and in what circumstances do religious beliefs arise? Are religions invented by humans simply to provide meaning in life, to understand and control their circumstances? Or, are religious beliefs firmly based on the awareness or revelation of divine, cosmic, suprahuman forces? Much intriguing—and often contentious—discussion about the origins of religion has been undertaken by many writers.[2] Although these topics are certainly touched on in these present volumes, this study is less concerned with the meanings, purposes, and origins of religion overall but is instead focused on the visible manifestations of diverse beliefs via the evidence in art and architectural forms. In other words, this study assumes (1) that religious beliefs have played a central role in the lives of humans through history and (2) that this fact is exceedingly well demonstrated in humanity's attention to the creation of religious art and architecture, past and present.

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS ART?

For purposes of this study, religious art is defined as any and all visible manifestations of belief. Such a broad definition is necessary because, throughout history and across the world, religious beliefs and practices have been, and continue to be, visually manifested in a great diversity of forms. These forms, of course, include the tangible and traditionally enduring monuments of architecture, sculpture, and painting, customarily studied by art historians. Readers will thus find much coverage devoted to these generally familiar categories of art, albeit in culturally diverse varieties. The forms of religious architecture discussed in these volumes include temples, shrines, synagogues, mosques, churches, and other worship environments constructed by humans. Numerous works of painting and sculpture are also discussed, such as stained glass windows, icons, statues of holy figures, pictorial narrative scenes, and so on. Many of these examples of painting and sculpture are closely associated with religious architectural structures, while other examples are less closely tied to specific architectural contexts.

However, our broad definition of religious art—as any and all visible manifestations of belief—also extends to forms of art that do not necessarily fit neatly into the traditional art historical categories of architecture, painting, and sculpture. Religious art is also performative; it involves actions and attitudes. Much attention in these volumes is thus devoted to the context and usage of religious art—not simply its appearance. Dance, music, song, ceremony, ritual actions, prayer, and the performance of individual or collective worship are all integral aspects of the religious nature of religious art. This study thus delves into areas of investigation most often associated with the disciplinary fields of archaeology, anthropology, and ethnographic studies. What the creators and users of religious art do and say (or do not say) about their beliefs and practices are critical factors in any efforts to understand the visual culture of past and

present societies.[3] The ongoing dialogues between art historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and scholars of visual and popular culture are reflective of a broader approach to the study and definition of religious art, from which this own work has benefited.

Indeed, it can be said that religious art not only reflects, but also creates, the primary symbols of meaning for humans and societies. In this sense, the diverse forms of religious art (from small to large scale, monumental to ephemeral, sophisticatedly crafted to more rustic) all function as activating agents as well as reverberations of humankind's ultimate concerns. A respectful approach to the world's religions, and attentive study and analysis of their visible manifestations can be seen as "itself a deeply religious act."[4]

THE IMPORTANCE OF ART IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

While the specific beliefs and practices associated with the world's religions vary greatly, all religions can be said to share an interest in creating or acknowledging a sense of the sacred in visible or symbolic form. Humans have expressed their religious impulses from prehistory to the present day in visible forms. Whether these forms are simple or elaborate, small or large scale, permanent or temporary, religious art and architecture serves to make beliefs visible and tangible in ways that sacred texts, writings, and scholarly commentaries do not. Indeed, it can be argued, that it is far more likely to be the visual forms of religious expression that impress and resonate most profoundly with believers and nonadherents alike. The visual expression of religious beliefs in art and architectural forms may be seen as the unity in diversity among the world's religions. It is this shared artistic impulse that provides the primary lens for this study of the world's religions.

> Across time, space, and culture, in all of humanity's wrestling with life and its meaning, the issues have been the same. Recognition of this bond with peoples of the past can give rise within us to an empathy capable of transcending our theological and liturgical particularities, an empathy that permits us to value another people's answers, another people's religion.[5]

When one first enters a medieval cathedral filled with the colorful glow of stained glass windows, or when one first stands in front of a Hindu temple replete with complex and elaborate sculptural carvings, the very special power of the visible expression of belief impresses one with extreme directness and tangibility. Whether this sensation is one of awe, or fright, or confusion, or attraction combined with a desire to know more, it can be said that religious art and architecture serves a critical function as the primary visible entrance or doorway into the belief systems of the world.

Entrances and doorways may be actual physical structures. They may also be seen as more symbolic passages into the realms of religious beliefs. In either

case, these entrances are often evoked and assisted by their visual forms. On the literal level, the design of religious architecture functions to create and signal sacred space—space that, in various ways, is differentiated, or set apart, from nonsacred space. One may enter a physical structure of faith (whether a temple, a church, a shrine, or a mosque, for example) by passing through a physical doorway. The entrance to the structure represents a transition from the exterior to the interior—from the world outside to the interior world of the sanctified space. The creation of physical and often permanent forms of sacred space can be (and often has been, historically and presently) a massive architectural undertaking. Many of the most visibly impressive architectural structures created by humans through the ages and around the world have been and continue to be designed for religious purposes.

However, sacred space can be (and often has been, historically and presently) created via other means. Sacred spaces can be created by an event, a temporary acknowledgment of the confluence or presence of sacred forces or powers, a performance, a ritual, or a recognition of preexisting sacredness in the world or in specific natural landscape features. Whether sacred space involves an imposing or humble architectural construction, major or minor manipulation of the environment by humans, or simply involves an acknowledged orientation to, or focus on, a ritual action or landscape feature, it can be argued that visuality, in some form, always plays a critical role in serving as an entrance/doorway/passage into belief systems, and also in directing and inspiring belief.

These closely related functions, of directing, promoting, and inspiring belief, are the fundamental grounds for religious art and architecture through the ages. Art plays an especially didactic and faith-directing role in some religious traditions, specifically in serving to teach adherents about the primary tenets of the religion in the form of visual narratives or symbols. It is often the case that these visual images are actually and physically located at the literal entrances to sacred buildings. These images, such as paintings and sculptures, which may show the events and stories from the sacred texts or may visually narrate the lives and deeds of holy figures, are common in many religious traditions. The appearance of these visual images on the exteriors of sacred structures often reinforces the transition from the secular and worldly to the sanctified and holy interior space.

Of course, the function of visual imagery as an entrance or passage into faith traditions is by no means restricted to the form of physical doorways on the exteriors of buildings. Visual imagery very often enriches the interiors of sacred spaces as well, and in this location serves the same function as doorways into the faith. Regardless of scope, location, and portable or nonportable format, visual images can serve as directing doorways into faith traditions by providing information and inspiration.

The inspiring function of religious art and architecture takes on a variety of different forms as well. The directive and edifying presentation of visuals (especially those involving figural imagery) is not demonstrated or shared by

all faith traditions. Islamic religious art, for example, maintains an extremely rich visual tradition but one that generally avoids figural, narrative imagery in sacred spaces. Even so, the primary aim of Islamic religious art is to inspire, and to assist adherents in their experience of the faith. One will not, for example, find visual illustrations of the life of Muhammad in a traditional Islamic mosque, whereas in traditional Eastern Orthodox churches one will often be overwhelmed by the abundance of visual imagery on all available surfaces—walls and ceilings—plus the holy icons placed throughout the church and on towering icon screens. Many protestant Christian denominations avoid visual imagery to a greater or lesser extent, whereas Buddhism and Hinduism are, in general, faith traditions that, in their various branches, significantly rely on visual imagery to teach and to inspire.

Whether in abundant and colorful presence or in determined and sparing absence, visual imagery plays a critical role as an entryway into all faith traditions. The creation and usage of sacred space also serves to provide a fundamental and shared passageway into the belief systems of the world. The study of the art and architecture associated with the world's religions is the guiding gateway through which we truly must enter in our goals of understanding and appreciating this unity and diversity.

> What distinguishes sacred art from other varieties is the window it opens onto another world—a world that is vaster, stranger, more real, and more beautiful than the world we normally encounter. . . . What makes art sacred is not what it depicts, but the way it opens onto transcendence and carries the viewer into it.[6]

It is the hope that this current publication will serve to convey and highlight to readers some sense of the brilliant diversity and shared fundamental importance of the visible in the study of the world's religions.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Readers will find that each chapter, in each of the two volumes of this book, has the same structure. Each chapter includes the same four parts (the origins and development of the religion, the principal beliefs and key practices, the traditional art and architectural forms, and selected and illustrated examples). This is deliberate. In visualizing and planning these volumes, the author has taken great care to ensure that each religion (or related sets of religions) discussed in the book is given the same coverage as all of the others, in the sense that each chapter is approximately the same length.

At the same time, this carefully designed structure has created some significant challenges for the author and will doubtless do so for readers as well. Not all materials ever fit neatly into any scholarly structure, as this book also hopes to demonstrate. Although it is quite sensible to begin discussions of many world religions with a section on the origins and development of the belief system, this

model works especially well for religions that can be traced to specific historical founders (such as Muhammad for Islam, Jesus for Christianity, and the Buddha for Buddhism). But, more than a great many other religions of the world cannot be traced to specific founders, and the origins of these belief systems cannot be so easily identified using the historical and chronological model, which assumes some type of starting point before which the religion was not revealed, known, developed, or practiced. Indeed, many of the world's belief systems are of unknown origin and reflect very ancient cultural traditions of diverse groups in a variety of different world regions. One can trace the historical origins of the religion of Islam to Muhammad, for example. One can discuss the cultural context in which he lived; one can describe the importance of his received revelations and the differences his message posed to then-current and previously practiced belief systems in the Arabian peninsula. But one cannot do so with religions such as Shinto and Hinduism, for example, nor for a great many other religions whose origins cannot be traced to a specific founder, although developments can often be traced through a series of later influential figures. In these cases, the origins and development chapter sections are far less relevant scholarly constructs, as the text hopes to point out as well.

Discussions of the principal beliefs and key practices of the religions covered in these volumes have also been fraught with a number of challenges. Several of the world's belief systems are quite clear about what their adherents are expected to believe and to do. Many religions have creeds, dogmas, or detailed descriptions of beliefs deemed to be correct. However, even within religious systems that are highly dogmatic, many variations and practices may exist. Not all Catholics attend Mass, and not all Jews adhere to the dietary regulations suggested in the ancient Hebrew scriptures. When Buddhism arrived in Japan in the sixth century CE, many of the ancient Shinto deities were given new names or developed other shared correlations with Buddhist deities. Islam recognizes the Hebrew and Christian traditions of prophetic revelation. Many Hindus regard the Buddha as one of many divine or divinely inspired beings. Some Protestant Christian groups maintain rites and rituals that are very akin to Roman Catholicism, whereas other Protestant Christians are extremely concerned to avoid any forms of worship practice that resemble those of Catholic or Orthodox Christians. Attempts to define the principal beliefs and key practices of a vast diversity of world religions will always run the danger of generalization. It is hoped that the present study manages to avoids this to some extent.

The traditional art and architectural forms associated with various belief systems also vary widely. In many cases, monumental architecture (temples, churches, synagogues, and mosques) are the most obvious examples, and the reader will appropriately find many discussions of these forms of sacred structures in several chapters of these volumes. Apart from these diverse architectural forms, and the arts of painting and sculpture often associated with them, the reader will also find discussions of how the sacred buildings were and continue to be used for the specific purposes of different faiths. How buildings appear—as

well as how they function—are both extremely important considerations in any discussion of religious art. However, the creation of permanent architectural structures (of large or smaller scale) does not characterize the arts traditionally associated with all religions or regions of the world. This fact is acknowledged and embraced in this study, so readers can expect to find a great diversity of forms of art described or illustrated in different chapters.

Each chapter includes a number of accompanying illustrations as well as several selected examples that are described in fuller detail. Although approximately the same overall number of illustrations are included in each chapter, readers will find that the number of examples chosen for more detailed discussion varies somewhat per chapter. It is hoped that this slight divergence in format between chapters will be welcomed and understood by readers as reflective of the richness of these materials overall as well as the potential for any one example to inspire additional research and consideration. In some cases, longer discussion of several illustrated examples will be found. In other cases, the number of examples signaled out for more detailed discussion is fewer. In some chapters, several groups of images are discussed together as examples of different forms that share the same general subject matter but that may demonstrate different dates, styles, and interpretations of traditional imagery. In all cases, the more focused discussion of specific examples is designed to complement and expand on the materials explored in each chapter, and in no cases is it designed to maximize the importance of selected monuments or diminish the importance of others not included.

At the conclusion of each chapter, readers will find a section titled "Bibliography and Further Reading." At the end of volume 2, readers will also find a selected bibliography. The chapter bibliographies—although fairly lengthy—in all cases necessarily represent only a sampling of the materials available for study of the art and architecture of specific religions or world regions. These listings are, of course, not comprehensive by any means, but may, at least, alert students to some of the major sources and the names of important scholarly specialists. Much additional scholarship exists, and continues to be avidly created, on any number of aspects of the world's religious art and architecture. Indeed, the bibliography on particular monuments (such as the Parthenon in Athens) would, in itself, at least fill a complete volume. Specialists might find the bibliographic listings in these present volumes rather eclectic in their inclusion of not only magisterial overall studies but also more arcane articles in highly specialized journals. This too is deliberate. It is hoped that the bibliographies and suggestions for further reading include samples of the vast range of works that demonstrate the ongoing and lively discussion into which students are encouraged to delve further.

The visual arts play an extremely important role in how religions and faith adherents self-define as groups and as individuals. In all cases, and in more than many ways, all faith traditions seem to require art (or at least an artful presentation of actions), and it is on this basis that this study rests.

NOTES

1. Byron Shafer, ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 4–5

2. For example, Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006); Barbara King, *Evolving God: A Provocative View of the Origins of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2007); David Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002); Steven Mithen, *The Prehistory of the Mind: A Search for the Origins of Art, Religion, and Science* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); John Pfeiffer, *The Creative Explosion: An Inquiry into the Origins of Art and Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); and John Super and Briane Turley, *Religion in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

3. "Visual culture" is a relatively recent term as well as academic discipline. It refers to the broad-ranging analysis of many forms of visual evidence and is especially concerned with acknowledging and including materials not covered in traditionalist art historical studies. Visual culture studies argue that all forms of visual evidence, from high to low—from the traditional art historical hierarchy of architecture, sculpture, and painting—to forms such as film, television, advertising, fashion, and popular visual ephemera are all important indicators of the values and concerns of diverse cultures. The applicability of this approach to religious art is obvious, as much religious art comes in forms that reside outside the traditional art historical arenas and styles. For example, see Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: The Study of Visual Culture after the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005); James Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), W.J.T. Mitchell, "What Is Visual Culture?" in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Views from the Outside,* ed. Irving Lavin (Princeton, NJ: Institute for Advanced Study, 1995), 207–17; and David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

4. John Dixon, "Art as the Making of the World: Outline of Method in the Criticism of Religion and Art," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, no. 1 (1983), 34.

5. Shafer, 4.

6. Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1986), 6.

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—1—

Prehistoric Belief Systems

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

The term *prehistory* is used to refer to time periods before written records exist or during which written records were not created. It is a rather controversial and problematic term, however, because writing systems were invented or came into use at different times in various areas of the world, so the chronological time span for prehistory can vary a great deal between different world regions.[1] Prehistory can refer not only to time periods before specific cultures developed their own writing systems, but also to time periods before written records were produced by other people about these world regions and cultures. In that sense, in some regions of the world (such as parts of the Americas, Oceania, and Africa), the prehistoric period can be said to have lasted well into the modern era and to have concluded only via contact with Europeans or other writing-producing outsiders.

Although it is clear that the term *prehistory* cannot and does not mean that no history existed before writing systems were invented or used in different world regions, the designations *prehistory* and *prehistoric* were first used by scholars in the 19th century who placed a great deal of emphasis on the presence of written language as an indication of cultural advances. More recent scholarship has questioned the assumptions that written language is a more important source of information about cultures than nonwritten oral traditions, and that the presence of a developed writing system is a necessary indicator of cultural development. It is always wise to remember that not all of the world's writing systems have been deciphered and also that our perceptions of what constitutes

writing are challenged by seemingly illegible texts. In particular, there is some intense scholarly disagreement about the interpretation of a number of ancient artifacts, primarily incised clay tablets and other examples of pottery, found in southeastern Europe, dating to ca. 5000 BCE, which bear what appear to be graphic markings or protowriting systems. The fact that these symbols or signs remain undeciphered by no means indicates their lack of meaning or possible function as conveyors of information. Whether or not these prehistoric signs can be seen as prewriting, or as complete (but as yet undeciphered) writing systems is a matter of debate.[2]

Nevertheless, in spite of these definitional issues, the term *prehistory* is generally understood to refer to a number of different eras of human habitation on earth, the evidence for which comes primarily from archaeological material, not from any decipherable written records produced at the time. "Prehistory is a kind of floating scale that refers in any given region to the period of human occupation before which there is literacy, and thus textual records."[3] The study of prehistory thus involves some special challenges that are rather different from those encountered in studies of time periods for which contemporary written, documentary evidence exists. It is also wise to remember that prehistory (no matter how defined) actually encompasses a substantial and vast time span of human presence on earth—many, many millennia longer than is covered by historical eras.

The archaeological material that exists to indicate human presence on earth varies widely in type as well as presumed dating range from region to region of the world, although it is generally believed that humankind originated in Africa some millions of years ago. The evolution of humans is often traced through a series of phrases (*Homo habilis, Homo erectus*) ultimately resulting in *Homo sapiens,* the ancestor of modern humans. The vast periods of prehistory are often divided up into several phases: The Stone Age (Paleolithic, Neolithic and Mesolithic), Bronze Age, and Iron Age (with dates differing from region to region of the world).[4] The terms *Stone Age, Bronze Age,* and *Iron Age* were developed by early archaeologists to refer primarily to the use of tools and metal production techniques developed during these periods, although as is more commonly understood now, this varies greatly between different world regions.

Because the evidence for prehistoric humans is primarily archaeological and not supported by contemporary written documents, any discussion of prehistoric belief systems tends to be extremely speculative. Some areas of the world (see chapters 6, 7, and 8 in this volume) are populated by cultures that still appear to retain vestiges of very ancient primal (or first) traditions.[5] Information about prehistoric religious beliefs may indeed be gleaned from studies of these traditional cultures, but caution in interpretation needs to be exercised too. "Scholars continue to use ethnographic analogies to explain possible belief systems . . . without the necessary critical distance. As a result, the presumed religion in Paleolithic times partly resembles the mentality of arctic peoples,

and partly resembles the beliefs of Australian aborigines, according to the experience and research interests of the scholar."[6] Ethnographic study of the current religious beliefs and practices of various indigenous cultures may provide a useful lens with which to study the prehistoric past, but care must be taken care in the comparative analyses of these materials as well.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

One of the greatest challenges facing scholars of prehistory involves the interpretation of visual material evidence. Although there is absolutely no lack of material to be analyzed (ranging from paintings and engravings on rock, large- and small-scale carvings, and architectural constructions as well), questions about the meaning, functions, and symbolism of this material have provided copious fodder for diverse approaches and interpretative strategies.[7] This is especially the case with objects to which religious meanings have been attributed. One common assumption is that peoples of the Paleolithic period (or Stone Age, approximately 40,000–10,000 BCE) were occupied or motivated by religious concerns to some significant degree and that this is evidenced in the visual arts produced by these ancient peoples. Many scholars agree "that prehistoric art is not unmotivated: it responds to religious preoccupations, it is the expression of, or in support of, myths."[8]

Scholarly attention has been devoted especially to the numerous examples of engraved and painted rock surfaces found in areas of Africa and Europe. Some of these examples have recently been dated to as early as 28,000 BCE.[9] In this period when humans were largely occupied with hunter-gatherer activities (basic subsistence modes), they also appear to have taken a significant amount of time to paint and carve images on rock surfaces, often deep within the caves in the entrances of which they may or may not have dwelled.

The prehistoric paintings and engravings found in caves in southern France and northern Spain have been especially often featured in discussions of prehistoric religion (see Plate 1). The naturally occurring geological cave formations were generally not physically altered in any way (by digging deeper, adding more passages, or enlarging the interior spaces) but were very richly embellished with paintings and carvings in often very deep spaces, extremely difficult to access.[10] It would seem clear that the creation of these prehistoric cave paintings and engravings represented an extremely significant activity for these early peoples. But what, exactly, do the subjects and symbols mean?

The most common subjects found in hundreds of examples of prehistoric cave art are animals, such as horses, bison, deer, and other species including the ibex and mammoth. Many of these animals feature in smaller-scale objects as well, such as carved or engraved objects of stone and horn (see Figure 1.1). Sometimes human figures are found, as are figures that combine both human and animal features. Additionally, other nonfigurative signs or markings are extremely common: geometric shapes, ladder designs, and various other symbols. Some



Figure 1.1 Incised reindeer antler ca. 11,000 BCE. London: British Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

images seem easily recognizable to modern viewers, as specific types or species of animals, whole other forms are extremely difficult to decipher. The animals are generally represented in profile; some show varying degrees of realism and detail; others are presented in more abstract or schematized fashions. The irregular contours of the rock surfaces also played an important role in the placement and forms of the images. The process of simply identifying the images has occupied scholars for many decades.[11]

> There are different levels of interpretation . . . the identity of the image; its literal meaning; and its symbolic meaning. The assumptions involved in each of these categories are cumulative. Naturally, all guesses at meaning depend upon the validity of the initial identification of the motifs—which, for the most part, we are unable to verify. What modern humans—whether rock art researchers or indigenous people—think is depicted in prehistoric art is always interesting, but reveals more about the interpreters than about the art.[12]

Several theories have been proposed to explain the meaning of the subjects and symbols depicted in these prehistoric caves. Very few scholars believe that these images have no meaning at all. Some scholars believe that the creation of this animal imagery represented a magical attempt to ensure and increase the number of animals for the food supply necessary for these peoples, that is to say, that the depiction of animals would guarantee their continued presence. Other scholars believe that the paintings and carvings were actively employed in pseudo-hunting rituals, that they were used as religio-magical-pedagogical teaching devices in which ancient peoples enacted hunting activities in a ritualistic fashion. But, because some evidence shows that several of the species of

animals depicted in cave art were not, in fact, primary or common sources of food for ancient humans, this theory has been subject to debate. Some scholars believe that the animals served as totems—symbolizing the ancestors of families, clans, or groups. Other scholars have proposed that the cave art was used for initiation ceremonies, providing information about critical survival skills to members of clans, tribes, or family groups. Much recent scholarship has linked the cave art to shamanistic practices—attempts to control, communicate with, and deal with the shared life forces of humans, animals, and the natural world.[13]

Not one of these many theories can be proven. The function of the caves and their art may have varied greatly between regions and time periods. Determining the specific meaning and intentionality of much prehistoric art is extremely challenging. Although it seems logical to assume that a meaning must be inherent—that there is no doubt that the caves and the subjects depicted within them represented extremely significant aspects of the lives and belief systems of prehistoric peoples—what these beliefs actually were remains a matter of great speculation.

> Because caves appear mysterious and menacing places to us, there has long been a tendency to associate their art with secret, esoteric, exclusive rites redolent of fear and awe. . . . Why should art have been placed in such inaccessible locations? Deep caves are strange environments . . . To enter a deep cave is to leave the everyday world and cross a boundary into the unknown—a supernatural underworld. It is easy to imagine that caves therefore symbolized transitions in human life and could be used for rituals linked with those transitions . . . Or perhaps it was felt that by entering this world one could better communicate or summon up the supernatural forces which dwelt there, and hence the images were made to reach and compel those forces. Cave decoration certainly requires strong motivation, since it involves negotiating such obstacles and taking both equipment and illumination into the site.[14]

Small figurines, carved from stone, bone, antler, ivory, and clay are also frequently found during the Paleolithic and later periods. Many have been found within caves and pits; others are clearly associated with burials. Both animal and human (male, female, and non-gender-specific) figurines are common. Among the most well-known and frequently reproduced as illustrations in both scholarly and popular texts are the so-called Venus figurines, which are clearly female. They are often, but not always, depicted with exaggerated indications of female sexual features and reproductive abilities (see Figure 1.2). Much scholarship has been devoted to these ancient objects, and highly lively debates continue to take place today regarding their purpose and function, who made them, and what motivated their creation.[15] Most agree that the child-bearing and life-giving significance of the female logically appears to have been of some importance for prehistoric peoples. This, in turn, has also led many scholars to identify a wide-spread devotion to a general goddess figure in prehistory.



Figure 1.2 The Vestonice Venus ca. 32,000 BCE. Brno, Czech Republic: Moravske Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

The scholarly as well as popular literature devoted to the goddess of prehistory has burgeoned dramatically in the later 20th century, reflective of the feminist movement generally and the resultant academic reassessment of the ways in which history and prehistory have been written about and understood. Viewpoints range widely—if not sometimes wildly—from those desiring to boldly reinstate the mother-goddess figure (and her nurturing matriarchal values) to her rightful position in not only prehistory but also the modern world,[16] to those who take a more cautious view about the assessment and interpretation of evidence.[17] It is an ongoing and very lively debate—and one which will doubtless continue to be transformed with new viewpoints reflective of the decades to come. For many, there seems little doubt that worship of a goddess/earth mother/fertility figure is indicated by the archaeological evidence from prehistory, although the exact nature and identification of the goddess or goddesses and the rituals carried out for worship remain somewhat speculative. Indeed, much disagreement exists about the motivations behind the creation of the figurines, as well as the use of the term "fertility figures" to describe these varied objects.

At different periods in prehistory, it appears that peoples in various world regions began to shift gradually from the hunter-gatherer mode to the agricultural mode or to combine hunting-and-gathering with more settled farming practices. Again, the dates for the adoption of agricultural practices, and the degree to which these replaced or supplemented previous modes of subsistence, vary greatly. Nevertheless, the development of agricultural practices certainly resulted in a more settled lifestyle among many ancient cultural groups and seems also to have resulted in even greater attention being paid to the construction of larger and permanent architectural monuments. Religious significance has been attached to many of these monuments, including the early temple/shrine structures of the Maltese islands (see Figure 1.9), as well as the numerous megalithic (large stone) constructions of virtually worldwide distribution. Many believe that the impressive carved megaliths at the site of Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Turkey date to as early as ca. 10,000 BCE and thus represent the very earliest example of a human-built religious center, constructed by nomadic peoples in a largely pre-agricultural period. All of these examples provide important materials for study and assessment of prehistoric belief systems, especially as manifested in the form of human-built architectural constructions.

In particular, the many ancient examples of standing stones (or menhirs) that appear in circles, pairs, short single rows, and multiple avenues have long attracted scholarly and popular attention because of their frequently impressive

size and enigmatic function.[18] Some of the best-known examples occur in the British Isles and on the European continent, such as the multiple row alignments at Carnac in Brittany (northern France), which have been dated to ca. 3000–2000 BCE (see Figure 1.3). The site of Stonehenge in England is also one of the most well-known and oft-studied of these examples (see Figure 1.10 and Plate 2). While the motivations for the placement and erection of these types of large stone monuments remain unknown, many theories have been advanced as to their purpose and function.

Large stones capped or roofed with stone slabs (often called dolmens) also exist in great numbers and are generally understood to have functioned as prehistoric tombs. This certainly seems to indicate that death—and some means of recognizing and enshrining the deceased—were important concerns in later prehistory. More monumental tombs, such as the one impressively large passage grave at Newgrange in Ireland (ca. 3000–2500 BCE) also include examples of extensively decorated carved stones both on the interior and exterior. Circles, lozenges, triangles, and spiral motifs are dominant; many have speculated that the designs have astronomical significance or otherwise refer to cycles of life and time (see Figure 1.4).

Although we lack contemporary written documents from the prehistoric periods, it does seems clear, from the archaeological evidence, that ancient peoples were concerned with issues of life, death, food, and health—and that they approached these concerns in ways that were not always or exclusively utilitarian. The animals painted and carved in prehistoric caves may indeed



Figure 1.3 Menhirs at Carnac, Brittany, France ca. 3000–2000 BCE. Clodio / Dreamstime.com.



Figure 1.4 Newgrange passage grave, Ireland, carved stone ca. 3000–2000 BCE. The Art Archive / Gianni Dagli Orti.

represent or symbolize some of the basic food sources for early peoples, but the extreme care, attention to detail, and physical difficulties surmounted by prehistoric people to visually embody these animals in the interiors of deep and dark caves seem evidence of—if not a codified belief system—at very least an attempt to honor, placate, assuage, or encourage the forces of the natural world that surrounded them. Survival and food sources are closely related concerns, which also appear to be evidenced by the early fertility or goddess figurines as well as the later large stone monuments that may have been designed to chart seasons of the year for the planting and tending of crops. The attention given by later prehistoric peoples to human death (via burials, cremations, and grave goods interred at burial sites) also seems to indicate that early people regarded death (as well as birth) as a significant event too, and one that was due some attention in a ritual format.

Nevertheless, "the question of the origin of religion is still unsolved."[19] Although many scholars believe that religion was "a part of human nature from the very beginning,"[20] others feel that the archaeological evidence simply does not support this claim. Even so, "the opinion that Paleolithic man already had a complicated religion, with certain notions of the holy and various rituals, can be found in nearly every religious reference work."[21] It is wise to remember that the span of prehistory is extremely vast and that while evidence of religious belief is indeed indicated during the late Paleolithic period (especially in the form of burials, assumed to be evidence of a belief in the afterlife or spirit world), one must exercise caution in reading too far back into prehistory for the origins of practices that developed later.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Because the span covered by prehistory is so great, and varies so widely in different world regions, prehistoric art exists in many different forms and materials. It must be immediately noted, however, that the definition of art is among the many terminological challenges faced by students of prehistory. This is especially the case when dealing with extremely ancient materials—such as the painted images and carved objects that provide the very earliest

evidences of what appear to be art-making activities by humans. Much intriguing scholarship has been devoted to analyses of the minds of ancient humans, the cognitive and creative processes that resulted in the initial creation of visual images.[22] But because the meanings and functions of these very ancient images and objects are often elusive, many scholars caution against the use of the term *art* to describe them. For modern audiences, art may have a variety of meanings—ranging from the expression of personal creativity on the part of specially gifted individuals, to works which express the community values and concerns of groups of people at different periods, to objects that are created for sale or display in galleries and museums.

It is always important to be reminded that *art* is not a strictly defined term that concisely and consistently refers only to specific forms of visual expression, such as the traditional categories of architecture, painting, and sculpture, as generally studied by art historians, or nonpermanent forms of artistic expression such as dance, masking performances, and music, such as studied by anthropologists and ethnographers. The term *art* can encompass an enormous range of forms—and can be used for objects or experiences that range from the permanent to the transitory, from the utilitarian to the seemingly unnecessary. If we accept that art—in its widest definition—involves the creation of visual and performance modes that express the values and concerns of groups of people at different periods in time, we may be somewhat better positioned in our attempts to understand the surviving art of prehistoric periods.

Of course, it is also critical to recall that the surviving material evidence from prehistory, although copious, is doubtless only a very small fraction of what once existed. The surviving objects of study are only those that were created from relatively durable materials, whereas the objects produced of more ephemeral or organic materials have long perished. It is thus quite impossible to reconstruct a complete picture of prehistoric art or religion simply based on the surviving material.

Durable rock carvings (petroglyphs) and paintings on rock (pictographs) provide a major portion of the materials available for scholars of prehistory. The animals, other figures, and graphic symbols characteristic of prehistoric rock art were created by engraving, carving, and painting with mineral-based pigments. The painting may have been done with brushes made of animal hair, or by spraying the pigments (through a tube or by mouth) directly onto the rock surfaces. Ladders or some forms of scaffolding must have been used to reach the upper wall levels and ceilings of caves and upper level wall surfaces.

The most ancient examples of prehistoric rock art have been found in Africa, Europe, and Asia. Relatively much more recent examples exist also in copious numbers in the Americas, in Africa, and in Australia especially, where many aboriginal peoples continue to closely guard their heritage and practice this form of art. The ancient peoples (from Africa, via Asia) who arrived to and populated Australia in the Paleolithic period are the ultimate ancestors of the many Australian aboriginal groups today. The old rock paintings of Australia,

and the recorded accounts about their origins and meanings, are important to consider here. According to some traditions, the sprit beings who created the earth in the Dreamtime (see chapter 7) also created the first examples of visual imagery. So the images found in rock art, as well as more modern bark painting, in Australia reflect these ancient guidelines and symbols that were set down in the long-ago past.

Images of spirit beings often feature in many examples of Australian rock art, such as the Wandjina figures depicted in the example shown in Figure 1.5, from the Kimberly region of northwestern Australia, which probably dates originally to ca. 1300 BCE. The Wandjina "are said to have come out of the sea and the sky, to have created features of the landscape and then to have been absorbed into the walls of rock shelters in the territories of different clans."[23] These beings are generally depicted with extremely large eyes, no mouths, and with haloes surrounding their heads. Although these images are of great antiquity, the aboriginal clans with whom specific examples are associated have continued to tend and care for the images over the centuries by regular repainting, "making the paintings equally part of the present and the past."[24] Thus, in some regions of the world, such as Australia, it could be said that prehistoric religious art is still being produced today.

Rock engravings and paintings of even more modern antiquity in Africa and the Americas also bespeak these ancient roots. Rock paintings created by the San (or Sandawe) peoples of southern and southeastern Africa are generally agreed to have ancient origins but are notoriously hard to date, as is generally the



Figure 1.5 Rock painting of Wandjina figures, Kimberly region, Australia ca. 1300 BCE. The Art Archive / Global Book Publishing.

case with much prehistoric art (see Figure 1.6). Although the images of hunters and prey found in many of these ancient Paleolithic, and more recent, African examples have been avidly studied especially within the context of San shamanistic practices of more modern times, the ultimate antiquity of these symbols and forms as well as the antiquity of beliefs surrounding them is challenging to determine.[25] Some of the most ancient examples of African rock art have been dated to ca. 25,000 BCE, whereas other examples are relatively much more recent. Much rock art from the Americas is similarly difficult to date and contains elusive meanings that are not necessarily explicated by the oral traditions surrounding these works.[26] Important examples of prehistoric rock art abound in many world regions.[27] Scholars continue to explore these challenging and intriguing arenas.



Figure 1.6 Rock painting, Tanzania, Africa ca. 15,000 BCE?. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

Figurines and larger sculptural works from the prehistoric periods were shaped and carved, via sawing or grinding with stone or metal tools (as developed by various dates), further enriched (via incision or engraving or painting), and appear in both relief and three-dimensional forms. Many works of terracotta (clay) were produced in the ancient Mediterranean world, such as the modeled clay figurines from Cyprus (see Figure 1.7). Many works were also produced in stone, such as the carved marble figures from the Cycladic islands (see Figure 1.8).

The terracotta statuette illustrated here from the eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus has been dated to ca. 1450–1200 BCE. Several such examples have been found, especially within tombs. Large-hipped female figures are frequent and often show exaggerated eyes and prominent beak-like noses. They are thus generally described as "bird-headed women" or "women with bird faces."[28] They may be shown with arms crossed or placed on their hips or torsos, with laterally projecting hairdos or enlarged ears enriched with looped terracotta earrings. Several examples depict the women carrying or cradling babies. Many scholars have associated these figures with fertility and regeneration, thus their placement within tombs is believed to indicate concerns with renewal of life, if not also a belief in the afterlife. Other evidence from ancient Neolithic and Bronze Age Cyprus, in the form of terracotta models of shrines/sanctuaries, plus materials from tomb excavations, appears to indicate a religious preoccupation with fertility and renewal, including practices of animal sacrifice and other ceremonial offerings. The terracotta works from ancient Cyprus demonstrate a



Figure 1.7 Terracotta statuette from Cyprus ca. 1420–1200 BCE. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

distinctive style and "show what today appears to be a playfulness and pleasure in creating complex forms with elaborate decoration."[29]

The older Cycladic example shown here has been dated to ca. 2700–2500 BCE and is typical of many other ancient marble figurines from this Aegean region. These early Cycladic figures, as well, show a highly distinctive and immediately recognizable style, the development of which took place over many centuries during the Neolithic period and early Bronze Age.[30] Several different types of statues were produced, including seated male figures playing harps and other musical instruments, voluptuous and rounded female figures, violin-shaped figures, as well as the relatively slim and schematized nude female figures most often featured in studies of Cycladic art. These range in size from small figurines of 8 to 10 inches in height to larger statues of many feet tall. Typically, the figures show flattened faces with long, vertical, projecting noses, elongated necks, small breast mounds, and triangular pubic areas indicated by carved incisions. The legs may be joined together or partially separated, and the arms are often positioned across the torsos.

A religious significance is generally assumed for these statues. They have often been termed "idols" or "fertility figures." Many have been found in asso-

ciation with graves, while taller examples (too large for typical burial practices) may have functioned as cult statues in shrines or other venues. Their exact purpose and use is unclear. It is wise to remember that, lacking written records,

> It is virtually impossible for us to comprehend the intent of the prehistoric carvers . . . we can only hypothesize about the language of the ancient Cycladic islanders, how they perceived themselves, their world, and their cosmos, and the meaning or significance they attributed to the marble artifacts they left behind. What is certain, however, is that these objects were important to the Bronze Age people in and around the Cyclades, as excavated examples come from contexts spanning more than six hundred years.[31]



Figure 1.8 Cycladic figurine ca. 2700–2500 BCE. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

The geometric abstraction and clarity of these minimal, schematic forms has had special appeal to many modern viewers, and much has been written about their remarkable visual impact, artistic restraint, and formal technique. Indeed, a number of important early 20th-century artists were much inspired by their encounters with "the clean lines and supple, abstract, but still human forms" of early Cycladic art.[32] "For many modern viewers, the stark, unadorned surfaces of nearly all of the objects seem consistent with the minimal definition of their forms, leading to the supposition that their modern appearance closely resembled their original state."[33]

Several recent researchers have, however, shifted the focus of scholarship on these ancient Cycladic works by drawing particular attention to the traces of mineral and vegetable pigments frequently found on these examples. Although this painted evidence has always been visible to some degree, modern scientific analysis techniques have greatly increased the awareness of the extent to which these objects were originally painted. Rather than being stark, unadorned, proto-modern works, it seems now clearer that these figures were originally much more richly embellished with boldly painted eyes and other facial features, plus details of jewelry and costume.

> Many, if not most, Cycladic figures were decorated with one or more colors, in patterns that do not necessarily emphasize or enhance their sculptural forms. And just as the idea of bright colors applied to the sculptures and architecture of Archaic and Classical Greece was at first difficult to accept, so elaborate painting on the smooth forms of Early Cycladic sculpted marbles definitely changes the way one thinks about these objects and the people who created them.[34]

This again provides an extremely useful reminder of the many challenges involved with the study and interpretation of prehistoric art. Modern viewers

of these ancient objects may simply not be seeing, or accurately imagining, their original appearances. This may hamper the interpretative understanding of the meaning, context, and purpose of the objects. At the same time, this is also a very exciting reminder of how continued scholarship serves to ever change, augment, and increase our knowledge and perceptions of prehistory.

EXAMPLES

Mnajdra Temple complex, Malta, ca. 3300–2500 BCE

The Maltese archipelago consists of several islands located in the Mediterranean Sea between Italy and north Africa. The islands are extremely rich in remarkable prehistoric remains, some dating from as early as the fifth and fourth millennia BCE. These remains include pottery and sculpture as well as numerous architectural structures, generally described as temples (see Figure 1.9). These ancient temples are believed to be among the earliest free-standing examples of religious architecture in the world. Some of the structures are single buildings; others are architectural complexes that include several temples. In all, there are over 20 temples on the islands, including major examples such as Mnajdra, Hagar Qim, and Tarxien on the island of Malta, and Ggantija on the island of Gozo.

Although much scholarly attention has been devoted to the Maltese temples, especially since the mid-19th century, early archaeologists were unclear as



Figure 1.9 Mnajdra Temple complex, Malta ca. 3300–2500 BCE. Mccarthy-studio / Dreamstime.com.

to the date of the structures, and most believed them to have been constructed by the Phoenicians, who were active in the Mediterranean world during the first millennium BCE and who were present on the Maltese islands in the seventh century BCE. Further archaeological work in the mid- to late 20th century, however, has determined the much greater antiquity of these important and unique structures. They are now dated largely to the mid-fourth through mid-third millennia BCE.

The monuments are unusual in that they appear not to have been influenced by other cultures or to have significantly influenced the architectural constructions of later cultures in the Mediterranean world. They are built of large limestone slabs using post-and-lintel as well as corbel construction techniques (layering projecting stones to form arches and vaults.) Most of the temples have enclosed courtyards with entrances leading into central areas from which three or more semicircular lobes or apselike chambers project. This lobed, trefoil, or cloverleaf plan is uniquely typical of Maltese temples. Several scholars have proposed that their shape mirrors the bulbous forms seen in numerous carved stone female figures also associated with the temples.

Free-standing carved stone blocks found in the temples are believed to have been used as altars. Animal bones found in excavations have led scholars to assume that animal sacrifices were practiced. The structures appear not to have served as burial sites because human bones have customarily not been found in the excavations. Cemeteries and funerary complexes also have been excavated on the Maltese islands, but they are generally separate and removed from the temples.[35] Some of the temples include relief carvings of animals (goats, sheep, pigs, fish, and bulls) plus various spiral designs. Several include interior benches and hearths. "The interiors of temples are relatively small, and it is thought that they were used mostly by religious specialists and officials, with larger congregations of the community taking place outdoors on the paved courtyards in front of temples."[36]

The architectural complexity, unique floor plans, and dominance of carved stone female figures found in association with these temples have led many to believe that prehistoric religion on Malta centered on goddess worship, a theme that many feel permeated Neolithic cultures in other world regions as well.[37] "Central to this culture is veneration of the Goddess-Creator in all her aspects, the major aspects being the birth-giver, the fertility-giver, the life- or nourishment-giver and protectress, and the death-wielder."[38] Others, however, are far less convinced that the Maltese temples give evidence of ancient goddess worship.

Overall, responses to the Maltese temples and their related art may be seen as intriguing reflections of the changing interpretative strategies that have been, and continue to be, employed in studies of prehistoric art. It is always wise to remember that "any interpretation of the past is a social product which has more to do with the historical moment in which it is produced than the period to which it refers."[39] The Maltese temples provide an especially fascinating study

of such reinterpretation. The temples today have become important centers of tourism, especially for goddess pilgrims who visit in great numbers to reconnect with the ancient matriarchal past.[40] The popular and archaeological discourses about the Maltese temples thus tend to diverge in some significant ways, reflecting different agendas and variant modes of understanding prehistory. For adherents of the goddess movement, the Maltese temples and their related art stand as signal proof of the prepatriarchal harmony of ancient female-centered cultures. Others, opposed to this view, see "no conclusive evidence that Malta was ever [a] a matristic Goddess-worshiping utopia."[41] Even so, the antiquity and importance of the temples themselves is not a matter of dispute, and "whatever other agendas each group has, a crucially important shared agenda is the preservation of the sites."[42]

Stonehenge, England, ca. 3000–1500 BCE

Stonehenge, on the Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire in southern England, is certainly one of the most well-known and well-studied examples of a specific type of prehistoric megalithic (large stone) monument[43] (see Figure 1.10 and Plate 2). Scholars have determined that there was a very long process of construction and use of Stonehenge (approximately 3000–1500 BCE), with many additions and alterations made to the site during three distinct phases of building and renovation. The monument consists of a number of large upright standing stones (menhirs), enclosed within a circular ditch (or *henge*) with a series of 56 burial pits on the interior of the ditch. Many archaeologists believe that the stones replaced an earlier timber structure on the site, which served as a type of mortuary chapel for corpses awaiting burial. The large sarcen (sandstone) menhirs, many of which are still upright today, were set up ca. 2000 BCE and arranged in a circle forming a complete ring with a continuous set of lintel stones. Although there are numerous other examples of prehistoric stone circles (widely distributed throughout the world), Stonehenge is unique in the fact that the builders shaped the huge stones with notches/joints in mortise-and-tenon fashion so that the monumental lintel stones fit neatly into slots carved on the tops of the giant uprights. Within the sarsen circle are five trilithons (two upright stones sharing a lintel) arranged in a horseshoe shape. The tallest is about 25 feet in height. In addition, bluestones (so named because they take on a bluish tone when wet) were added in a later phase, and a large altar stone was set up close to the center of the circle. The bluestones were transported to the site from Wales (about 190 miles away) via water and overland dragging, while the sandstones were dragged to the site from about 15 miles away.

Clearly, the efforts entailed to create, maintain, and renovate this monument over thousands of years are evidence that Stonehenge was of extreme significance for the prehistoric peoples of the region. However, interpretations of the function and purpose of Stonehenge have ranged widely, if not wildly, through centuries of scholarship. A number of scholars currently agree that

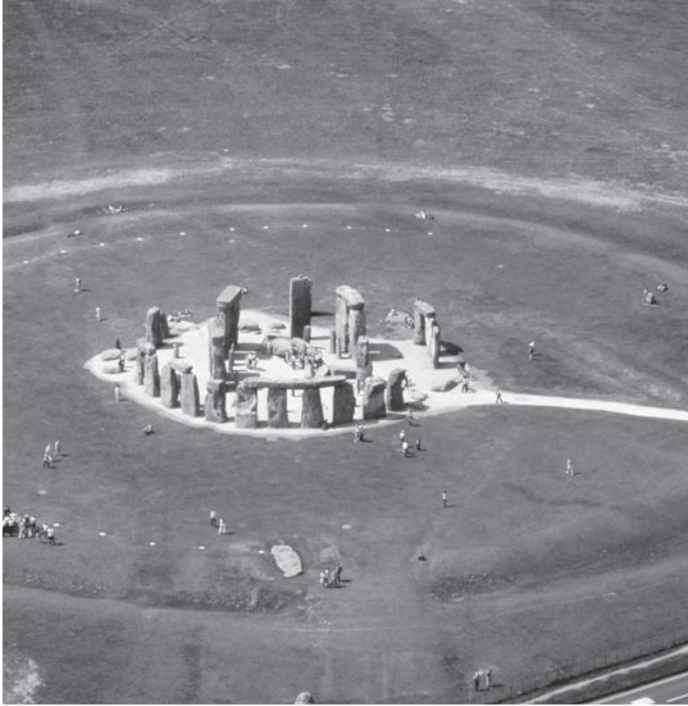


Figure 1.10 Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England, ca. 3000–1500 BCE, aerial view. National Trust / Art Resource, NY.

Stonehenge primarily, if not originally, served as a monumental observatory for charting the seasons of the year by indicating the summer and winter solstices. The midsummer sun rises over a specific stone, and several stones are also aligned to the midwinter sunset. This archaeo-astronomical aspect of Stonehenge has attracted the greatest attention in late 20th-century technology-based scholarship,[44] although other theories about Stonehenge (as a site for ancient Druid rituals, as a marker of territory, as a solar temple for worship of the sun god) have been proposed.

As with all examples of art and architectural forms from prehistory, the lack of written records makes it difficult to do anything other than purely speculate about purpose and function. The logical tendency is to assume that Stonehenge had a religious or ritual function of some sort—but the exact nature of this will doubtless continue to be explored by generations of scholars and enthusiasts in the future.

Minoan Snake Goddess, ca. 1600 BCE

This small (13½ inches high) glazed earthenware statuette is one of the most frequently reproduced images of ancient religious art (see Figure 1.11).



Figure 1.11 Minoan Snake Goddess ca. 1700–1600 BCE. The Art Archive / Heraklion Museum, Crete / Gianni Dagli Orti.

The object was discovered in the early 20th century during the excavations undertaken by the British archaeologist, Sir Arthur Evans (1851–1941), at the site of the great Palace of Knossos on the island of Crete. Evans's pioneering work at Knossos, his nomenclature of the Minoan civilization (after the legendary King Minos of Knossos), the chronology he developed for the various phases of this civilization (ca. 3500/3000–ca. 1050 BCE), and his theories about and reconstructions of Minoan art and architecture have provided the foundations for subsequent scholarly work as well as intense dispute about this ancient culture.

The Minoans appear to have been a prosperous and peaceful civilization who engaged in trade and commerce with other ancient peoples in the Aegean and Mediterranean world, notably the Egyptian, Syrian, and Cycladic cultures. The Minoans were great builders, and a number of impressive residential and ceremonial centers (or palaces, Knossos being the largest) were constructed beginning ca. 2000 BCE. Frescoes, pottery, metalwork, engraved seals, figurines of animals and humans in clay and ivory, jewelry of gold, bronze, and gemstones all survive in abundance and give evidence of a high degree of sophistication and skill with art production in a wide range of media.

Much scholarship has been devoted to the topic of Minoan religion, based on numerous representations in Minoan art of scenes involving god and goddess figures, priest and priestess figures, worshippers, ritual offerings, and processions. Objects that appear to be cultic/ceremonial in nature have been found in abundance not only in the several palaces but also in caves and sanctuaries located in the hills and mountains.[45] Altars and offering tables, votive figurines, ritual libation vessels, and symbols such as double-axes, bull's horns, and heraldic animals are the most common forms in the artistic vocabulary of Minoan ritual practices. Some scholars believe that Minoan palaces were deliberately laid out and oriented toward the peak sanctuaries in the neighboring mountains where caves devoted to worship of a nature or fertility goddess were located.[46]

Whether as Mistress of the Animals, Goddess of Nature, Fertility Goddess, Bird Goddess, or Water Goddess—solo or accompanied by a Warrior/Hunter God—the female goddess figure dominates the imagery of Minoan religious art.

Whether she is one goddess with several different aspects or several different goddesses is unclear.

The glazed earthenware statuette of the Snake Goddess in the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion, Crete, demonstrates many aspects of her traditional imagery. On engraved seals, wall paintings, and in other media, the same forms appear: the long flounced skirt, narrow waist, tall silhouette, and bared breasts. When the figurine was found in the early excavations at Knossos, it was broken in several places. The head of the figure and the head of the one original snake were missing as well as most of the figure's left arm. These missing pieces were created and attached to the figurine by an early 20th-century artist/conservator employed by Sir Arthur Evans. Although the head is not original, the beret/cap and cat/feline form atop the beret were found in the excavations (although not with the figurine) and were attached to the reconstructed head to make up the ensemble as it exists today.[47]

In spite of the frequency with which this image is reproduced, the Snake Goddess per se is otherwise a relatively rare subject in Minoan art. Several other statuettes do exist of similar figures with outstretched arms twined with snakes, but several of these are modern forgeries loosely based on this one reconstructed example and a few other examples with secure ancient origin. Although there seems "ample archaeological evidence for a predominant female deity (or deities) on Crete,"[48] the attention given to the cult of the Snake Goddess in particular has tended to overshadow and dominate the discussion. It is wise to remember that for the periods of prehistory without written sources, much remains a matter of speculation. Indeed, "until Minoan writing is deciphered, the precise nature of early Cretan religion must remain uncertain."[49]

NOTES

1. In ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, the writing systems known, respectively, as cuneiform and hieroglyphs, are generally dated to ca. 3000 BCE; writing developed in China about 1500 BCE, and the Maya culture of Mesoamerica developed a writing system ca. 300 CE. See Anne-Marie Christin, ed., *A History of Writing: From Hieroglyph to Multimedia* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002) and Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Writing* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

2. The numerous studies by Marija Gimbutas argue for an "old European sacred script" that pre-dates Mesopotamian and Egyptian writing by several millennia. See, for example, Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.) A differing view is proposed by Shan Winn, *Pre-Writing in Southeastern Europe: The Sign System of the Vinča Culture* (Calgary, Alberta: Western, 1981) who describes the markings found on European prehistoric artifacts as a "proto" (not fully developed) writing system. A useful overview is provided by James Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), especially chapter 4, "The Signs of Writing."

3. Randall White, *Prehistoric Art: The Symbolic Journey of Humankind* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 8.

4. Traditional dates for the prehistoric eras in Europe, for example, are roughly as follows: the Stone Age (Paleolithic: 40,000–10,000 BCE; Mesolithic: 10,000–7000 BCE; Neolithic: 7000/6000–3000 BCE), Bronze Age: 2500–1500 BCE, and Iron Age: 1500–500 BCE.

5. Göran Burenhult, *Traditional Peoples Today: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994).

6. Ina Wunn, "Beginning of Religion," *Numen* 47, no. 4 (2000), 418.

7. Margaret Conkey, "Making Things Meaningful: Approaches to the Interpretation of the Ice Age Imagery of Europe," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Views from the Outside,* ed. Irving Lavin (Princeton, NJ: Institute for Advanced Study, 1995), 49–64.

8. Jean Clottes, "The Identification of Human and Animal Figures in European Palaeolithic Art," in *Animals into Art,* ed. Howard Morphy (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 22.

9. The paintings in the cave of Chauvet, France, just recently discovered in the mid-1990s, are now considered to the oldest examples and have been dated to ca. 28,000 BCE. See Jean Clottes, *Chauvet Cave: The Art of Earliest Times* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003) and Jean-Marie Chauvet, Eliette Deschamps, and Christian Hillaire, *Dawn of Art: The Chauvet Cave: The Oldest Known Paintings in the World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.)

10. The following passage by Noel Smith describing his personal experience visiting the cave of Les Trois Frères in France captures this perfectly; he writes: "Many people have commented on the great difficulties that Ice Age people overcame in negotiating some of these caves . . . but one cannot fully appreciate what they endured until traversing a cave like Les Trois Frères. Before entering, one dons high rubber boots, coveralls, knee pads, a hard hat, and, of course, a powerful light. Once in the cave one must alternately crawl through low muddy passages, climb over boulders, cross pools of water and oozing mud, climb or descend muddy inclines and rocky precipices, ease down slippery slopes, and in one case descend a vertical drop at the edge of a pit where one slip could end in tragedy. And in the midst of this, one finds exquisitely drawn animals that vanished from the area ten thousand years ago." Noel Smith, *An Analysis of Ice Age Art: Its Psychology and Belief System* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), xii.

11. Michel Lorblanchet, "From Naturalism to Abstraction in European Prehistoric Rock Art," in *Form in Indigenous Art: Schematisation in the Art of Aboriginal Australia and Prehistoric Europe,* ed. Peter Ucko (Canberra, Australia: Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 43–56.

12. Paul Bahn, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Prehistoric Art* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 176.

13. See, for example, Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998) and Miranda Aldhouse-Green and Stephen Aldhouse-Green, *The Quest for the Shaman: Shape-Shifters, Sorcerers and Spirit-Healers of Ancient Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005.)

14. Bahn, *Cambridge Illustrated History,* 138.

15. LeRoy McDermott's suggestions that these figurines are self-portraits created by women has recently generated much lively discussion. LeRoy McDermott, "Self-

Representation in Upper Paleolithic Figurines," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (1996): 227–75.

16. For example, see, Carol Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997); the numerous works by Marija Gimbutas (see bibliography); and Peg Streep, *Sanctuaries of the Goddess: The Sacred Landscape and Objects* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994).

17. Margaret Conkey and Ruth Tringham, "Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology," in *Feminisms in the Academy,* ed. Donna Stanton and Abigail Stewart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 199–247; Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon, 2002); Jo Ann Hackett, "Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern 'Fertility' Goddesses," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 1 (1989): 65–76; Kathryn Rountree, "The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate," *Social Analysis* 43, no. 2 (1999): 138–65; Lynn Meskell, "Goddesses, Gimbutas and 'New Age' Archaeology," *Antiquity* 69 (1995): 74–86; and Mary Jo Weaver, "Who Is the Goddess and Where Does She Get Us?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 1 (1989): 49–64.

18. See Aubrey Burl, *From Carnac to Callanish: The Prehistoric Stone Rows and Avenues of Britain, Ireland and Brittany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993) and John Michell, *Megalithomania: Artists, Antiquarians and Archaeologists at the Old Stone Monuments* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982.)

19. Wunn, 448.

20. Wunn, 448.

21. Wunn, 433.

22. For example, see David Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002); Steven Mithen, *The Prehistory of the Mind: A Search for the Origins of Art, Religion, and Science* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Barbara King, *Evolving God: A Provocative View of the Origins of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2007); and John Pfeiffer, *The Creative Explosion: An Inquiry into the Origins of Art and Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

23. Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 55.

24. Morphy, 56.

25. Brian Fagan, *From Black Land to Fifth Sun: The Science of Sacred Sites* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998), especially chapter 3, "San Artists in Southern Africa," 51–69; and David Coulson and Alec Campbell, *African Rock Art: Paintings and Engravings on Stone* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

26. Among copious sources for this material, a very useful introduction is Polly Schaafsma, *Indian Rock Art of the Southwest* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 1980).

27. Robert Brooks and Vishnu Wakankar, *Stone Age Painting in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

28. Carlos Picón, Joan Mertens, Elizabeth Milleketer, Christopher Lightfoot, and Seán Hemingway, *Art of the Classical World in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 458.

29. Picón et al., 223.

30. Joan Mertens, "Some Long Thoughts on Early Cycladic Sculpture," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 33 (1998): 7–22.

31. Elizabeth Hendrix, "Painted Ladies of the Early Bronze Age," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 55, no. 3 (1997–98): 4–5.
32. Hendrix, 6.
33. Hendrix, 4.
34. Hendrix, 6.
35. A. Bonanno, T. Gouder, C. Malone, and S. Stoddart, "Monuments in an Island Society: The Maltese Context," *World Archaeology* 22, no. 2 (1990): 190–205.
36. Kathryn Rountree, "Re-inventing Malta's Neolithic Temples: Contemporary Interpretations and Agendas," *History and Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (2002): 35.
37. Streep, especially chapter 5, "In and of the Earth: Malta," 83–101.
38. Muriel Hilson, "Neolithic Art and the Art History Class," *Studies in Art Education* 32, no. 4 (1991): 235.
39. Rountree, "Re-inventing," 32.
40. Kathryn Rountree, "Goddess Pilgrims as Tourists: Inscribing the Body through Sacred Travel," *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 4 (2002): 475–96.
41. Rountree, "Re-inventing," 45.
42. Rountree, "Re-inventing," 46.
43. Richard Hayman, *Riddles in Stone: Myths, Archaeology and the Ancient Britons* (London: Hambledon Press, 1997).
44. Gerald Hawkins, *Stonehenge Decoded* (London: Fontana, 1970).
45. Peg Streep, *Sanctuaries of the Goddess*, especially chapter 7, "The Goddess at the Peak: Crete," 130–57.
46. Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).
47. Kenneth Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess: Art, Desire, and the Forging of History* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002).
48. Lapatin, 73.
49. Lapatin, 90.

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Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Geography

Mesopotamia is an ancient Greek term that means "the land between the rivers." This region, the core of which is primarily located in present-day Iraq, roughly between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, has often been called the cradle of civilization. It is acclaimed for evidencing some of the very earliest human achievements in agriculture and irrigation methods, for the use of the wheel, for the invention of writing methods and of mathematics, and for the early development of urban centers.

Mesopotamia is at the heart of a much larger geographic region often called the fertile crescent. The term *fertile crescent* was first used in the early 20th century by the American scholar James Henry Breasted (1865–1935), the founder of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, to describe the vast geographic region extending from the eastern Mediterranean northwards to the Syrian desert and southeast to the Persian Gulf. Mesopotamia refers to the wide area of the fertile crescent roughly corresponding to all of present-day Iraq, plus sections of southeastern Turkey, eastern Syria, and parts of western Iran.

Chronology

Although human habitation in Mesopotamia can be traced far back into prehistory, it was the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals,

beginning perhaps around 9000 BCE, that provided the early foundations for the eventual and lengthy growth of a series of settled communities and civilizations in this region. The "entangled millennial history" of Mesopotamia involves a series of periods named after, or associated with, a succession of civilizations that came to prominence in particular regions, that overlapped with or conquered earlier civilizations, and that established empires of greater or lesser duration.[1] A basic chronology of these ancient civilizations (spanning ca. 4000 BCE to the second century CE) would include the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Hittites, Kassites, Assyrians, Persians, Hellenistic Greeks, and Romans.

The initial transition from small agricultural villages to much larger urban centers took place largely in the fourth millennium BCE in both northern and southern Mesopotamia (Sumeria). These early cities were inhabited by people who had developed, doubtless over many previous centuries, impressive architectural construction techniques, and who lived within a highly stratified society in which emphasis was placed on earthly as well as heavenly/religious concerns.

One of the most substantial of these early cities was Uruk, in southern Mesopotamia. Uruk was the largest of a number of urban centers of the Uruk period (ca. 4000–2900 BCE). The site appears to have been inhabited since the fifth millennium BCE and remained continually occupied up through the seventh century CE. Uruk is especially famous for its remarkable art and architecture and, traditionally also, for the development of the earliest recognized writing system in world history: cuneiform (or wedge-shaped) writing.[2] Cuneiform evolved from the previous system of pictographs used by the early Sumerians and others who scratched small pictures (primarily representing words/objects, mostly inventories of cattle, food, and other goods) into soft clay tablets with reeds or a sharp tool (stylus). This early pictography eventually developed, around 3000–2900 BCE, into the more abbreviated signs of cuneiform and a complex system of grammar that allowed for the creation of much longer texts, documents, legal, and literary works.

Early Sumeria was ultimately composed of a number of independent city-states, which were frequently at war with each other. These Sumerian city states in the Early Dynastic period (ca. 3000–2340 BCE) were ruled by powerful dynasties of leaders, some of whose names are known (such as Gilgamesh, ca. 2700 BCE) and whose deeds and heroic exploits were later recorded. These rulers were understood to have had special relationships with the deities in functioning as their chief servants on earth. Each Sumerian city-state was believed to be under the protection of one or more deities whose presence was symbolized and embodied in the dominant temple complexes that traditionally provided the urban focal points. Major cities such as Ur (the leading city of Sumeria by around 2500 BCE, with a population of over 20,000), Eridu, Kish, Nippur, and Lagash were flourishing centers of commerce and art production.

Following the Early Dynastic centuries, during the third millennium BCE, northern Mesopotamia came under the control of the Akkadians who

ultimately, under the leadership of Sargon (r. 2334–2279 BCE), conquered the southern Sumerian city-states. The vast Akkadian empire ultimately comprised most of the regions of the fertile crescent. In the late third millennium BCE, however, the Akkadian empire was overthrown by invading peoples from the northeast. This ultimately ushered in the Neo-Sumerian period (ca. 2125–2025 BCE) with the ancient cities of Ur and Lagash again playing prominent roles. The western Amorites, who began to enter Mesopotamia in the late Neo-Sumerian period, established their capital at the city-state of Babylon. During the early second millennium BCE, Babylonia was the major city-state in the region, notably flourishing during the reign of Hammurabi, who ruled from ca. 1792–1750 BCE. The Babylonians were ultimately supplanted by the Hittites (in the middle of the 17th century BCE), and then by the Kassites (in the middle of the 15th century BCE), who were, in turn, conquered by the Elamites from Iran. The Assyrians became the major power in the region during the late second and early first millennium BCE until the re-ascendance of the Babylonians (in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE), and the Persian Achaemenians (in the sixth through fourth centuries BCE), followed by the Hellenistic Greeks via the conquests of Alexander the Great, who died in Babylon in 323 BCE. Ultimately, sections of Mesopotamia came briefly under Roman rule in the second century CE before the reestablishment of Persian power under the Sassanids (during the third through sixth centuries CE), followed by the Arab Abbasids (of the eighth and ninth centuries CE). These periods, the religions of ancient Persia (e.g., Zoroastrianism), and the later phases of Mesopotamian history lie outside the scope of this present discussion.

Even a brief survey of the exceedingly complex history of ancient Mesopotamia demonstrates that this region was, and indeed continues to be, of signal historical importance for world history. In its position as the birthplace or cradle of Western civilization, this area of the world (bridging Asia and Africa and Europe) has experienced a remarkable and lengthy history, characterized by the rise and fall of a plethora of civilizations and cultural groups whose achievements in science, engineering, literature, and the visual arts continue to serve as extremely impressive testimonials of these ancient peoples.

Our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations comes primarily from two sources: archaeological evidence and written documents. Although copious materials of both of these forms still exist, the evidence that survives represents only a tiny sampling, simply shadows of these ancient cultures. The ongoing conflicts and conquests that took place in this region during antiquity, as civilizations succeeded each other in power and control, resulted in the destruction of much archaeological and artistic material. Attempts to destroy the past and shatter its visible monuments by way of ushering in new eras is an all too common event in human history. Many of these destructive actions happened in ancient Mesopotamia, as well as in other ancient world regions. The looting and pillaging of potentially valuable art works has always fueled the past and current market for dealers in and collectors of antiquities.

Nevertheless and without doubt, the looting and destruction of a monumental portion of the collections housed in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad in the wake of the American invasion of 2003—preceded and followed by years of political unrest in the country and the looting of many significant archaeological sites—remain signal tragedies in human history. It is a truly disastrous fact that so many ancient works of art and archaeological sites of ancient Mesopotamia—the cradle of Western history and civilization—have now been irretrievably lost to history and will never be recovered.[3]

Religion

The complex and lengthy history of ancient Mesopotamia—the extent of the geographic region and the many civilizations that have successively inhabited this area of the world—provide many challenges in any attempts to succinctly describe Mesopotamian religion. Although many scholars have confidently undertaken this task, other scholars believe that it is really quite impossible to do so.[4] Any description of religious beliefs in ancient Mesopotamia needs to take into consideration the complicated history of this world region and look carefully at the surviving textual and archaeological evidence from a notably lengthy succession of cultures.

What did the ancient Sumerians believe? Were their religious beliefs and practices different from those of the slightly later Akkadians, or the much later Babylonians, or the Assyrians? "Mesopotamian religion presents itself as a complex, multilayered accumulation," which is additionally complicated by the association of this world region with early Judaic history as well.[5] The ancient biblical patriarch Abraham was born in the Mesopotamian city of Ur; Mesopotamia is often said to have been the location of the biblical Garden of Eden; the biblical stories of the Great Flood are found in ancient Mesopotamian writings as well as in the Hebrew scriptures. The relationship of the Hebrews, who eventually settled in Israel, with their neighbors in Mesopotamia form a significant portion of ancient Jewish historical narratives (see chapter 9, "Judaism"), especially when the Babylonians extended their empire to the east and subsumed the land of Israel, destroyed the preeminent Jewish Temple in the city of Jerusalem, and took the Jews into captivity in Babylon in the sixth century BCE.

Judaism is a monotheistic religion. It developed in the ancient world in—or *as*—a great contrast to the polytheistic religious beliefs held by numerous other peoples in the fertile crescent. The ancient Sumerians, and their successors (the Akkadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and other peoples) were polytheistic. They devoted their worship focus not to a single god or goddess, but to many different gods and goddesses. These gods and goddesses were associated with various and critical natural forces—observed in the movements of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the seasons of the year—plus events such as wind, flood, fire, and drought.

The primary deities of the ancient Sumerians were: An (the god of the sky), Enlil (the god of the air and wind), Ninkhursaga (the goddess of the earth), and Enki (the god of the waters.) A vast panoply of other deities were also venerated in, or associated with, various ancient Sumerian city-states. This "older generation" of gods were the ancestors and source of other deities, some of whom became especially prominent under the Akkadians.[6] These include astral deities such as: Nanna, or Sin (the moon god), Utu, or Shamash (the sun god), and Inanna, or Ishtar (the star goddess of Venus and fertility). The deities of the ancient Sumerians actually numbered in the thousands, and successive cultures in Mesopotamia tended to retain, absorb, and modify the pantheon. Ishtar was the most widely worshiped deity of the Babylonians (by the second millennium BCE), whose powerful god Marduk (son of the storm) ultimately derived from the Sumerian wind god, Enlil. The major Assyrian god, Assur, similarly also had many of the attributes of the Sumerian sky god, An (or Anu). Although the names and roles of the deities evolved and were slightly altered in successive phases of history, and some deities were especially prominent and venerated in particular locales during specific periods, in general there appears to be a remarkable sense of similarity and continuity in the beliefs and religious practices among the civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

Evidence for the principal beliefs and key practices associated with religion in ancient Mesopotamia is based on archaeological and textual sources. Archaeological evidence takes the form of monumental architecture (temples and temple complexes) and numerous examples of small-scale works in various sculptural media (stone, metal, and clay) that depict deities, humans, and ritual actions. Because so much of the surviving art from ancient Mesopotamia seems to be religious in nature, it appears that religion played a critical role in these ancient societies. This impression is also supported by the vast body of textual evidence, myths and epic stories of the creation of the world, tales of the activities of the gods and goddesses, documents that detail temple holdings and goods, and other works containing prayers, hymns, and directions for rituals.

Although it is not always possible to confidently correlate the artistic and textual evidence (for example, the exact identification of specific deities and pictorial narrative scenes on many works of art remains speculative), it appears clear that religion—centered on the powerful deities—was a major component of ancient Mesopotamian life. "Ancient Mesopotamians regarded personal well-being as being tied to correct worship of the gods. If an individual sinned or a community neglected the proper rites, disorder, plague, earthquake, fire, or other evils could befall the entire community."[7] The various deities were thus regarded as active forces in the realms of human life and human endeavors. Pleasing and placating these divine figures, who in turn would protect, nourish,

and support humans, is generally seen to be at the core of Mesopotamian religious practices.

Achieving and maintaining the beneficence of the deities was critical, and the enactment of highly formal duties was the primary responsibility of the ruling and priestly members of society. Ordinary people did not play a major role in this but served primarily as distanced onlookers to the formalized rituals that were carried out by the appointed specialists. "For the average person [in ancient Mesopotamia], religion was ceremonial and formal rather than intense and personal."[8] Rituals performed in temples were off limits to ordinary people; however, there were also larger public festivals that the general population could witness and in which they could participate to some degree.

In many ways, the religious practices of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations resemble those of the ancient Egyptians, who similarly developed a highly stratified society in which the formal or state religion was largely in the hands of the upper and priestly classes. Like the temple complexes of ancient Egypt, the temple complexes of ancient Mesopotamia were centers of wealth and power and served as social and economic focal points of the cities and city-states. Unlike the ancient Egyptians, however, Mesopotamian cultures appear not to have developed any extremely detailed beliefs about death and the afterlife, which were matters of such importance to the ancient Egyptians (see chapter 3: "Religion in Ancient Egypt").

Although "many literary texts struggled with the meaning of death and dealt with the fortunes of the dead in the netherworld" (including the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld*), the ghostly inhabitants of the netherworld, presided over by various deities and courtly bureaucracies, existed in a pale imitation of life on earth, in a "land of no return."[9] Funerals and burials were often elaborate, especially for the upper classes, and bodies were often buried with grave goods and personal items, but most bodies were buried without any of the preservation or mummification practices associated with ancient Egypt. The concepts of reincarnation, heavenly rewards, or torments in hell for sins on earth do not appear to have been factors in Mesopotamian conceptions of death or the afterlife.[10] "The worst punishment dispensed to a sinner was denial of entry by the gods of the netherworld. In this way, the sinner was sentenced to sleeplessness and denied access to funerary offerings."[11] Funerary offerings were regularly made to the deceased, and again, the degree of elaboration depended on their social standing or family wealth. Proper offerings ensured the favor of the ghosts of the dead, and several times a year celebrations were held during which the ghosts might return briefly to earth. Dangerous and restless ghosts could cause evil for the living, as could demons or evil spirits who were frequently appeased by rituals and incantations or warded off with protective amulets. Priests and sorcerers were often involved with exorcisms or reading omens via several different forms of divination. The richness and complexity of religious beliefs and practices in ancient Mesopotamia is well demonstrated also in the surviving religious art and architecture.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Temples and Ziggurats

Temples—in the form of religious buildings with specific spatial enclosures—appear to have been critical components in ancient Mesopotamian urban centers, serving as focal points for the cities. Scholars believe that each ancient Mesopotamian city was dedicated to a specific god or goddess among the polytheistic pantheon and that the inhabitants of the cities believed that the god/goddess to whom their city was dedicated actually or symbolically resided (or might choose to reside) within the temple complex provided by the people of the city. Temples thus served as the dwelling places for the patron/patroness of the city, but they also served extremely important economic roles as well. "The temple represented the communal identity of each city."[12] They were considered to be the homes as well as the estates of the deities. Temples owned property and engaged in "various productive and commercial activities . . . [such as] cultivation of cereals, vegetables, and fruit trees; management of sheep, goats, and cows; manufacture of textiles, leather, and wooden items; and promotion of trading links with foreign lands. These enterprises necessitated storerooms, granaries, and workshops within the temple enclosure."[13] Surpluses of food and goods were maintained by the temples and distributed to the populace in times of need. Temples also performed other charitable acts (such as caring for poor or orphaned children) and provided a venue for certain legal proceedings (such as the swearing of oaths). Temples could thus be vast complexes of buildings, including buildings outside the city.

At the heart of the temple complex, the religious architectural structure most commonly associated with ancient Mesopotamian belief systems is the ziggurat. Ziggurats are multitiered, stepped monuments, on the tops of which temple structures were raised. The ziggurat form evolved largely in the Neo-Sumerian period (ca. 2150–2000 BCE), ultimately based on earlier practices of erecting temples on large elevated platforms. The elevation of the temple created visual prominence for the monument and also served practical concerns in protecting the temple from floods or attacks during frequent periods of warfare. Many scholars believe that the practice of elevating temples toward the heavens also reflects important symbolism—the desire that the deities would descend from the heavens to reside in a sacred and lofty abode. The description of the infamous Tower of Babel in the Hebrew scriptures is often assumed to have been based on ancient Mesopotamian ziggurats, notably the great ziggurat of Babylon (see Figure 2.1).

Ziggurats were generally constructed of sun-dried brick encased in slightly more durable kiln-fired brick. Ziggurats were constructed by the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians with some variations and modifications in style. The ziggurat of Ur (ca. 2100 BCE) is one of the most famous of these early ancient monuments.

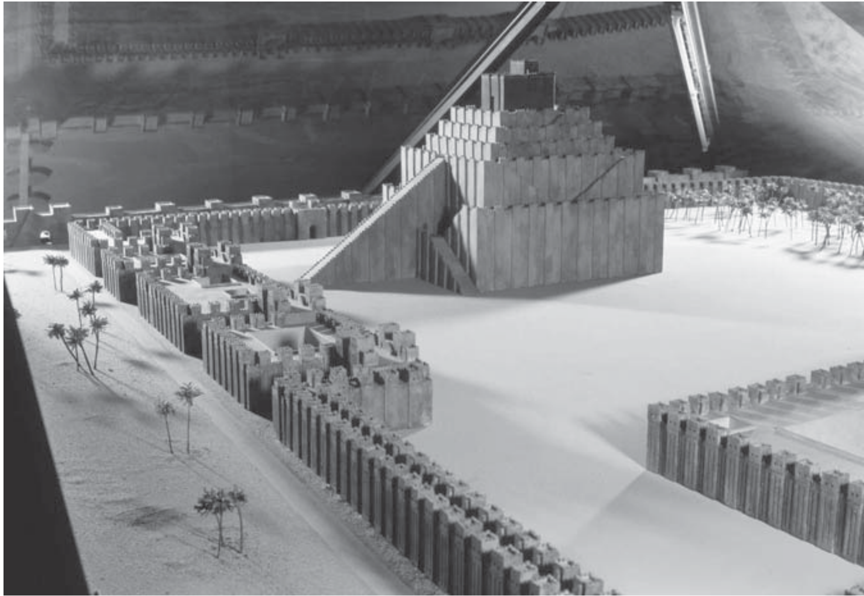


Figure 2.1 Model of the Marduk sanctuary at Babylon with the Tower of Babel. From the time of Nebuchadnezzar II, 604–562 BCE. Berlin: Vorderasiatisches Museum. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

Deities and Devotees

The gods and goddesses of ancient Mesopotamia were frequently depicted in art and are generally recognizable because of distinctive attributes and symbols. By and large, Mesopotamian divinities were represented in anthropomorphic form, that is, in the guise of human figures. This poses a contrast to many of the deities of ancient Egypt who often combined human and animal attributes, in zooanthropomorphic forms. With rare exceptions, Mesopotamian deities were conceived with human attributes and "were regarded as an aristocracy of great landowners, the country's powerful upper class. . . . the gods and their world were modeled on the world of humans."[14] The deities had spouses, children, servants, and a royal entourage "similar to a human ruler, but without human boundaries."[15]

Statues of the deities were installed in the temples, and these images were profoundly significant in that they were believed to be inhabited by the divinities.[16] Textual and visual evidence indicates that these sanctified images, or cult statues, were fed, clothed, and entertained by priests and other temple personnel.[17] Very few, if any, of these cult statues have survived, but images of the deities appear in many other media.

The deities are frequently identifiable due to their garments and especially their elaborate headgear or crowns. For example, the moon god Nanna is



Figure 2.2 The Ur-Nammu stele, ca. 2100 BCE. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

believed to be the deity represented on an early limestone stele that was discovered during the excavations of ancient Ur in the 1920s[18] (see Figure 2.2). Known as the Ur-Nammu stele, this well-studied monument, which originally stood over 10 feet in height, contains numerous relief scenes carved in horizontal registers on both sides, representing male and female deities, and kingly figures carrying building tools and making offerings to the deities. Although the specific identification of the figures and activities shown are matters of some scholarly dispute, the scene illustrated in the reconstruction shown is traditionally believed to depict the great Sumerian king and builder Ur-Nammu (ca. 2112–2095 BCE) making a libation offering to the moon god Nanna. Nanna presents Ur-Nammu with a staff and coils of rope, symbols of power and authority as well as references to architectural construction tools and measuring devices. The deity wears an elaborate tufted robe and a tall crown that consists of several tiers of horns. He is seated on a throne that resembles a temple structure with a series of recessed doorframes, partially covered by a scalloped canopy.

The iconography of the Ur-Nammu stele, with a seated deity approached by a standing figure of a worshiper, is often repeated throughout ancient Mesopotamian art. Another especially famous example showing this imagery is the stele with the law code of the Babylonian ruler, Hammurabi, ca. 1780 BCE (see Figure 2.3). "One of the most remarkable treasures of the ancient world," this

tall black basalt stele contains the cuneiform text of Hammurabi's law code, the earliest to have survived in great detail (earlier law codes of rulers such as Ur-Nammu survive only in part).[19] The cuneiform text of 3,500 lines, detailing close to 300 laws, is surmounted by a carved relief scene depicting the standing figure of Hammurabi respectfully approaching the seated sun god, Shamash. The stele was probably originally placed in the temple of Shamash at Sippar. The god Shamash wears a flounced robe, necklaces and bracelets, and is seated on a throne with architectural motifs similar to that depicted on the Ur-Nammu stele. Flames, or sun rays, surround his shoulders, and he wears an elaborate tiered horned headdress and a square, curled beard. He presents the symbols of authority—a staff and ring—to Hammurabi, who raises his hand in a gesture of respect and deference to the divine figure. Unlike the Ur-Nammu stele, where the king offers a libation, on the stele of Hammurabi, "the space between the king and the deity has been freed, allowing the two figures to be closer and emphatically gaze into each other's eyes."[20]

The tufted or flounced robes (sometimes referred to as *kaunakes*—although scholars dispute the use of this term) and the horned headdresses worn by the deities in these examples contrast with the relatively plainer garments and caplike headgear (often termed *polos*) worn by the kingly figures. Although these garments and headdresses do not always, or exclusively, indicate either divine or human status, a Sumerian cylinder seal from ca. 2000 BCE shows figures also wearing these distinctive garments and hats. Cylinder seals survive in great numbers from ancient Mesopotamia and are among the most important and traditional forms of Mesopotamian art.[21] Normally made of stone and shaped like spools, they were used to create clay stamps to seal, protect, validate, or identify documents, storage jars, and other objects. Many cylinder seals contain both cuneiform texts and images, such as the example shown in Figure 2.4. In this case, the seated figure, wearing the flounced robe and *polos*-style hat, has been identified as the deified ruler Ibbi-Sin (ca. 2028–2004 BCE). He holds a cup and is seated on a low stool.[22] Approaching him are two standing figures; the central figure wears a flounced robe and horned headdress that identify her as a goddess. She grasps the arm of a male figure who raises up his right hand, mirroring the goddess's gesture of greeting to the divine ruler. The standing male figure is hatless and wears a long fringed robe. The inscription identifies him as the owner of the seal, Ilum-bani. Traditionally identified as a presentation scene, the worshiper/petitioner is led by the goddess into the divine royal presence.



Figure 2.3 Stele of the law code of Hammurabi, ca. 1792–1750 BCE. Paris: Louvre. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 2.4 Cylinder seal, ca. 2000 BCE. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

Figures of worshipers also feature prominently in other media from ancient Mesopotamia. Among the most famous are the group excavated in the 1930s from the site of the temple of the god Abu at Eshnunna (modern Tell Asmar) (see Plate 3). The figures, which have been dated to ca. 2700 BCE, are carved out of gypsum and stand anywhere from nine inches to two feet tall. Both male and female figures were found, and the majority are portrayed standing upright with their hands folded across their chests. Many of the men are bearded and wear belts and long fringed skirts. The women also wear long robes. All of the figures have extremely large staring eyes, inlaid with shell and black stone. They are traditionally described as votive statues and are believed to have represented worshipers in perpetual prayer to the deity venerated in the temple. Many such examples have been found at various sites, and some are identified with inscriptions, telling the name of the person who offered the statue or naming the deity worshiped.

Statuettes of royal figures were also frequently placed within temple complexes, indicating their authority and close relationship with the deities. The great Neo-Sumerian ruler of Lagash, Gudea (ca. 2150?–2125? BCE) was represented in a remarkable series of close to 30 examples of both seated and standing statues, some of which survive intact while others are in more fragmentary form[23] (see Figure 2.5). Many are carved from the costly stone, diorite, and are enriched with inscriptions detailing Gudea's piety and his dedication to the deities he served, for whom he had many temples newly built or restored. Evidence suggests that these royal statues were, like the cult statues of the deities, believed to be animated (via ritual consecration ceremonies) and thus able



Figure 2.5 Seated statue of Gudea, ca. 2150–2100 BCE. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

to communicate directly with the gods and goddesses.[24]

EXAMPLES

The Warka Vase, ca. 3500–3000 BCE

The Warka Vase (or Uruk Vase) is one of the most significant examples of ancient Mesopotamian religious art (see Plate 4). It was discovered in the 1930s during excavations at the ancient site of Uruk (the modern city of Warka) in Iraq. The tall alabaster vessel stands about a yard tall and is enriched with low relief carvings in several registers, showing some "of the first illustrations of the ritual and religious practices that were the basis of Mesopotamian society."[25] One of the greatest treasures of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, this object was taken from the museum during the disastrous looting and destruction of the museum's collections in 2003. It was eventually returned to the museum and has undergone restoration and repair.

The vase was originally excavated from the site of the temple of Inanna, the patron goddess of Uruk, and so is considered to have had a ritual function. Indeed, two vessels of similar format are illustrated in the top register of the relief carvings, among the numerous other gifts being presented to the goddess. Scholars generally agree that the scenes carved on the vase illustrate the highly important annual New Year festival of the city in which offerings to the temple were made to ensure the continued protection of the patron goddess, who symbolized fertility and fruitfulness. "At a time when the survival of individual humans was still so very precarious, and when organized agriculture and cattle breeding were still fairly novel, the gifts of life and food were the most serious concerns of the people."[26]

The bottom register of the vase depicts water (indicated by rippling lines) from which two varieties of plants or trees sprout healthily. (These are variously identified as barley and palms, or flax.) The next register shows an orderly line of alternating male and female sheep. The middle register depicts a procession of plump, naked male figures carrying baskets, ceramic vessels, and pots filled with food. The top register (a portion of which was damaged in antiquity) depicts the goddess (or a priestess) standing outside the temple (symbolized by two curving reed poles) who is approached by an offering-bearer, similar to the figures in

the register below. The missing/damaged section is believed to have illustrated the priest-king (or En) of Uruk. Only a section of his long, fringed belt, held up by an attendant, survives. The priest-king is understood to be at the head of the offering-bearing procession, presenting gifts to the temple in the annual festival. Some scholars believe this also represents the symbolic marriage of the deity and ruler, a ritual that took place during the New Year celebrations.[27]

Although scholarly descriptions and identifications of some of the specific objects and actions depicted on the vessel diverge slightly, it is generally agreed that "the vase itself narrates, perhaps for the first time in the history of humans . . . a complexly organized society with spiritual, moral, and practical functions."[28] The protection of the patron deity, the role of the temple in receiving and storing food and gifts for the benefit of the population, and the role of the ruler (priest-king) in serving as leader and intercessor between the human and divine realms are illustrated in a significantly early, clear, linear, and sequential narrative fashion.[29]

The Ziggurat at Ur, Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE

The ziggurat at Ur was constructed under the direction of the important and influential king, Ur-Nammu (ca. 2112–2095 BCE), whose "piety and attention to building and restoring shrines led to his posthumous deification."[30] Ur-Nammu ruled over a significant territory in Sumeria and directed the construction of ziggurats at the cities of Eridu, Uruk, and Nippur as well. The ziggurat at Ur has been called "the first proper ziggurat" and is one of the few examples of these type of ancient structures to remain standing today, albeit in an incomplete and only partially restored state[31] (see Figure 2.6).

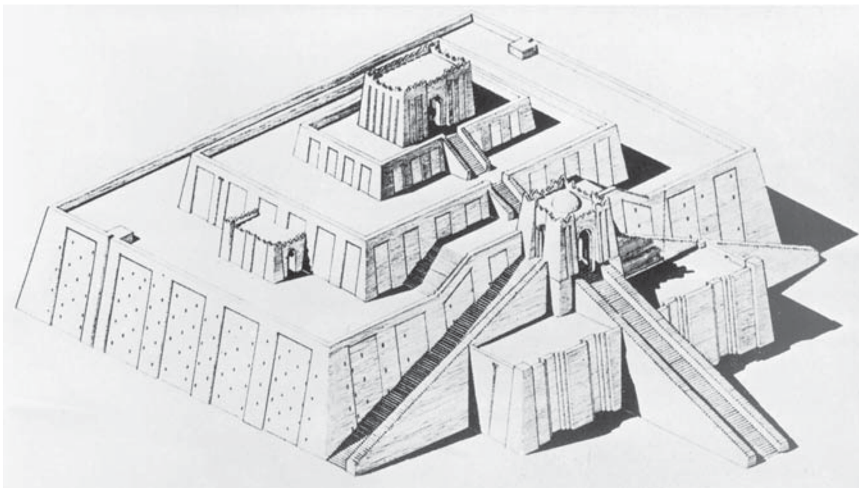


Figure 2.6 The Ziggurat at Ur, Iraq, ca. 2100 BCE. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

The reconstruction drawing shows the monument as it would have originally appeared. It consisted of three successively smaller, inward-sloping platforms on a base of over 200 by 140 feet. It is estimated to have been well over 70 feet tall. The very top terrace was occupied by the temple structure itself—an enclosed, rectangular building (none of which survives.) The temple was dedicated to the patron deity of Ur, the moon god, Nanna. This impressive edifice was approached by three long flights of stairs that met at a tower gate on the first terrace level. Two smaller flights of stairs led from there up to the second and third platforms. Only priests were allowed to visit the upper levels and enter the temple to perform rituals and make offerings to the deity.

It is extremely important to realize that the ziggurat at Ur was the nucleus of a much more extensive religious/economic complex. Excavations have revealed numerous other structures, including storerooms, smaller buildings, courtyards, and a shrine dedicated to the goddess Ningal (the partner of Nanna). The whole of the sacred precinct was surrounded by a wall and was located at the core of the ancient walled city. Several residential quarters have also been excavated at Ur. Cities such as ancient Ur were highly organized economic centers in which the highly visible elevated temple/ziggurat represented the life source of the community.

Clay Mask of the Demon Humbaba, ca. 1800–1600 BCE

This intriguing object references several significant aspects of ancient Mesopotamian religious beliefs, practices, and mythology (see Figure 2.7). Found at the city of Sippar in southern Iraq, this small clay mask represents the demon Humbaba (or Huwawa, or Khumbaba), a major character in the *Epic of Gilgamesh.* The face is formed of coiling lines representing the internal organs of a sacrificial animal. Study of the entrails of animals was practiced in ancient Mesopotamia as a form of divination, a means to foretell the future.[32] The ancient Mesopotamians "believed that the gods disclosed their intentions to humans by signs in natural phenomena and world events. These signs could be interpreted through prolonged observation and deep study. The most common forms of divination were examination of the entrails of sacrificial animals (extispicy) and observation of the stars and planets (astrology)."[33]

Diviners, who were usually scholars associated with the royal governments or military, solicited and received omens from the gods and often recorded these communications in texts or handbooks and other forms, such as this clay example. A cuneiform inscription on the back of the piece identifies the maker of the mask as Warad-Marduk, a diviner who was active in the city of Sippar. The city of Sippar was dedicated to the sun god Shamash, who was often associated with powerful omens. The mask is formed of a continuous coiled line in configurations that are believed to have symbolized a revolution or upheaval to come.



Figure 2.7 Clay Mask of the Demon Humbaba, ca. 1800–1600 BCE. London: British Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

The demon Humbaba is also mentioned in the cuneiform inscription on the back of the mask. According to the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* Humbaba was a monstrous demon who guarded the Cedar Forest. He was eventually conquered and killed by the hero Gilgamesh and his friend and companion, Enkidu. Ultimately, the chief god Enlil punished and killed Enkidu for this deed, demonstrating that all life depends on the favor (or disfavor) of the gods.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is doubtless the most famous and well-studied work of ancient Mesopotamian literature.[34] The saga recounts the heroic deeds and adventures of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in their search for immortality.

> It is a work of adventure, but it is no less a meditation on some fundamental issues of human existence. The Epic explores many issues; it surely provides a Mesopotamian formulation of human predicaments and options. Most of all, the work grapples with issues of an existential nature. It talks about the powerful human drive to achieve, the value of friendship, the experience of loss, the inevitability of death.[35]

Gilgamesh was an actual person, king of the Sumerian city of Uruk in the early third millennium BCE. However, the epic itself, which exists in several versions

from the early to mid-second millennium BCE, represents variations and elaborations of legends associated with his name. Gilgamesh, "like King Arthur . . . is a historical figure, though better known in legend than history."[36] And, like the Arthurian tales much later in Western Europe, scenes from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are often seen in ancient Mesopotamian art, especially on cylinder seals. Many of these scenes include Gilgamesh battling with great beasts and encountering numerous deities who play major roles in the tale, although exact iconographic identification of several motifs remain subjects of scholarly speculation.[37]

Section of the Facade of the Eanna Temple from Uruk, ca. 1415 BCE

During the second millennium BCE, the Kassites came to power in southern Mesopotamia and occupied numerous ancient sites such as Uruk. The temple in Uruk constructed by the ruler Karaindash (or Kara-Indash), dedicated to the goddess Ishtar (Inanna or Eanna), in many ways typifies the continuity of religious beliefs and practices in ancient Mesopotamia (see Figure 2.8). The



Figure 2.8 Section of the facade of the Eanna Temple, Uruk, Iraq ca. 1415 BCE. Berlin: Vorderasiatisches Museum. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

Kassites appear to have "very deliberately perpetuated Babylonian culture and civilization in the political, religious, and intellectual fields [and] continued the policy of building and maintaining sanctuaries."[38] The goddess Ishtar is one of the most ancient of Mesopotamian deities, and "one can speculate that by building a temple at the already ancient and storied city of Uruk, to a goddess whose importance stretches back for more than a millennium, the Kassite king was attempting to not only exploit the important natural power of such gods but to also demonstrate his legitimacy in the eyes of the local population."[39]

The molded and baked clay reliefs—a Kassite innovation—represent elongated figures of male and female deities standing frontally in recessed niches. Wearing typical horned headdresses and long robes, the figures hold overflowing vessels with parallel streams of water descending onto rounded forms (mountains?) The scalelike pattern on the robes of the male deities, and the undulating pattern on the robes of the female deities may identify them as divinities who "embody natural forces—earth and water—which underlie those of the fertility goddess Inanna, to whom the temple is dedicated."[40]

The goddess Inanna plays an important role in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as well as in the ancient work (early to mid-second millennium BCE) known as the *Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld,* which tells of her journey to, imprisonment in, and eventual release from the realm of the dead.[41] One of the most ancient and widely venerated deities, Inanna is frequently depicted in Mesopotamian art.

Relief from the Palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad, Late Eighth Century BCE

The Assyrians came to dominance in northern Mesopotamia in the first millennium BCE and established an extensive empire controlled by powerful rulers based in several impressive cities. The city of Khorsabad (ancient Dur Sharrukin) constructed by Sargon II (r. 721–705 BCE) is an especially good example of the prestige and ambitions of these powerful rulers. The walled city, which measured about a square mile, included a ziggurat, sanctuaries for at least six deities, residential areas, and a vast elevated royal palace enriched with magnificent art works.

These include numerous relief carvings of the king and his great deeds, as well as massive guardian figures of winged human-headed bulls (*lamassu*) and winged human figures generally identified as genies, or beneficent celestial beings. One such genie is shown in Figure 2.9, a gypsum relief about 10 feet tall. The figure wears a long tufted robe, a horned headdress, armlets and bracelets, and carries a small bucket (or *situla*). The pineconelike object he holds in his right hand is customarily identified as a sprinkler, used to scatter drops of sanctified liquid in rituals of purification and immunization against evil forces.



Figure 2.9 Relief from the Palace of Sargon II, Khorsabad, Iraq, late eighth century BCE. Baghdad: Iraq Musuem. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Numerous such relief carvings appear in Sargon's palace in Khorsabad as well as in other great Assyrian fortress citadels such as Nimrud and Ninevah. While distinctively Assyrian in style and iconography, these works also demonstrate the continuity of ancient Mesopotamian beliefs in the necessary favor of the divine forces for human well-being and success.

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6. Karen Rhea Nemat-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 182.
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19. Polk and Schuster, 6.
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21. The literature on cylinder seals is voluminous. Useful sources are Dominique Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (London: The British Museum Press, 2005) and Edith Porada, "Why Cylinder Seals? Engraved Cylindrical Seal Stones of the Ancient Near East, Fourth to First Millennium B.C.," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (1993): 563–82.

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28. McDonald, "The Warka Vase," 80–81.

29. See Schamdt-Besserat, especially 41–46.

30. Nemat-Nejat, 188.

31. Nemat-Nejat, 188.

32. See John Matthews, *The World Atlas of Divination* (Boston, MA: Bulfinch Press, 1992) and Robert Temple, "An Anatomical Verification of the Reading of a Term in Extispicy," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 34, no. 1–2 (1982): 19–27.

33. Nemat-Nejat, 198.

34. Many translations and commentaries exist including: Andrew George, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Sumerian and Akkadian* (London: Penguin, 2003), Stephen Mitchell, trans., *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (New York: Free Press, 2004) and N.K. Sanders, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin, 1972).

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— 3 —

Religion in Ancient Egypt

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Evidence for the development of civilization in ancient Egypt dates at least back to the fourth and fifth millennium BCE. From these early origins, and for close to 3,000 years thereafter, ancient Egyptian civilization developed and maintained a remarkable degree of continuity. Religion consistently played a central, critical role in society. When the Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt in the middle of the fifth century BCE, he was extremely impressed by the ancient monuments and expressed his opinion that the ancient Egyptians must have been exceedingly, if not excessively, religious. The importance of religion is abundantly demonstrated in the surviving art and architectural monuments of ancient Egypt, the majority of which were designed for, or which can be seen to reflect, religious purposes. "Egypt is an outstanding example of a religious tradition pervading a civilization continuously for well over 3000 years, the inner cohesion being supported by the geography and by long periods of relative isolation."[1]

The history of civilization in ancient Egypt, centered around the fertile and longest river in the world, the Nile, is traditionally divided into a series of distinct but continuous periods. Although specific dating for ancient Egyptian history is extremely problematic and often disputed, it is generally thought that what is termed the Pre-Dynastic period began ca. 3500 BCE. Toward the end of this era the separate civilizations of upper (southern) and lower (northern) Egypt were geographically and politically united under single rulership. This marked the beginning of the Dynastic period (ca. 2920 BCE) when political leadership

was held by a series of supreme rulers, or pharaohs. The 31 dynasties of ancient Egyptian history began in the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2920–2575 BCE) with the first three dynasties of rulers. The subsequent long centuries of Egyptian civilization are then traditionally divided into the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, with intermediate periods between these eras. The exact chronology is a matter of scholarly divergence.[2] The Old Kingdom (ca. 2575–ca. 2134 BCE), of the fourth through eighth dynasties, is often considered to be the critical foundational period during which belief systems were developed in a codified form and the classic, traditional styles of religious art and architecture evolved. The Middle Kingdom (ca. 1240–1640 BCE), of the 11th through 14th dynasties, was followed by the period of the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1070 BCE), of the 18th through 20th dynasties. During the subsequent later eras, Egyptian civilization entered a Late Dynastic period, was eventually conquered by the Persians in the mid-sixth century BCE, by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, and by the Romans in 30 BCE. Needless to say, this brief outline hardly does justice to the length and complexity of Egyptian history, which includes periods of prosperity and stability as well as times of social and political upheaval, internal conflicts among rival rulers, periods of foreign control (for example by the Asiatic peoples known as the Hyksos from ca. 1630–1540), and periods of territorial conquests and warfare waged by numerous Egyptian rulers (for example with the Nubian kingdoms in the south.)

The history, art, and religion of ancient Egypt have intrigued and fascinated scholars for many centuries. An important and early summary of the overall chronology of ancient Egyptian history, which provided the basis for the division into periods and dynasties used today, was composed in the late third century BCE by an Egyptian historian and priest named Manetho. His major work, written in Greek, is known as the *Aegyptiaca* (*History of Egypt*) and, like the much earlier king-lists found inscribed in temples or on papyrus scrolls, provides a selected chronology of Egyptian rulers from the very ancient period to the fourth century BCE. Manetho's division of Egyptian rulers into dynasties has had an enormous impact on later historians, although it should be noted that his use of the term *dynasty* includes groups of rulers not necessarily related by birth.

A few centuries before Manetho, the Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt and recorded his descriptions and impressions in the second book of his *Histories*. Later Greek and Roman historians, such as Strabo and Diodorus Siculus, visited Egypt in the middle of the first century BCE, and their writings are significant sources of information about the ancient monuments and customs surviving into the late period of Egyptian history. Ultimately, as part of the vast territory of the Roman Empire, Egypt became Christianized, and then later (during the seventh century CE), came under Arab Islamic domination. "Eventually, Egypt's temples and other monuments of her pharoanic past became as mysterious to the Egyptians themselves as they were to the outside world."[3]

Very significantly also, as the spoken and written languages of ancient Egypt were replaced by Coptic, which became the language of the Egyptian

Christian church, and later by Arabic, knowledge of the writing systems of old Egypt was entirely lost. "The evidence suggests that by the end of the fifth century (CE) knowledge of how to read and write the old scripts was extinct. . . . The break in knowledge was complete. The hieroglyphs were fully surrendered to the larger myth of ancient Egypt—the land of strange customs and esoteric wisdom."[4] Although important attempts were made by some medieval Arabic scholars to decipher the hieroglyphic writings,[5] throughout the Middle Ages Egypt was "a source of little more than stories and legends, which grew ever more fabulous as they spread."[6] The European rediscovery, in the early 15th century, of a manuscript known as the *Hieroglyphica*, attributed to Horapollo (an author of the mid-fifth century CE, purportedly one of the last members of the ancient Egyptian priesthood, or a scholar/grammarian) resulted in a great surge of interest in ancient Egypt among Renaissance scholars.[7] Printed editions of the *Hieroglyphica* were first produced in the early 16th century, followed by numerous later editions and translations. This text, "combining a distinctly Greek point of view with a smattering of knowledge of the Egyptian language and culture . . . was taken up by early typographers and printers. . . . whose extrapolation of the hieroglyphic tradition led to investigation of the symbolic properties" of the ancient symbols.[8] Hieroglyphs (the term itself comes from Greek for "sacred writing"; the ancient Egyptians used the term *medu netcher:* "the gods' words") were thus associated with magical symbols of highly esoteric meaning and complexity.[9]

Greater advances in knowledge and study of ancient Egypt date only to the 18th and 19th century with a series of European scholars who traveled extensively in Egypt specifically to document and describe the ancient monuments. The military campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) in the late 18th and early 19th century mark a critical point in the growth of Egyptology as an academic field. Napoleon's "scholars systematically studied and recorded monuments and artifacts in a manner which was truly unprecedented . . . [ultimately resulting in] nothing short of a mania for all things Egyptian, and adventurers, antiquarians, artists and scholars began to travel to Egypt in increasing numbers."[10]

A major breakthrough came in the early 19th century with the work of the French scholar Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832). His successful decipherment, in 1822–24, of the three parallel texts inscribed on the late first century BCE Rosetta Stone (discovered in 1799) paved the way for the continued burgeoning of Egyptian studies through the 19th and 20th centuries, up to the present day. "With Champollion's decipherment of the hieroglyphs . . . Egyptology changed dramatically from a speculative exercise to a scholarly discipline."[11]

Egyptology (or the study of ancient Egypt) is a distinctive and multidisciplinary academic field whose chief adherents have been and continue to be archaeologists, art historians, historians, historians of religion, linguists, epigraphers, and paleographers, among others. Scholarship on ancient Egypt

continues to flourish; even so, there is still much to be discovered and learned about the history, religion, art, and culture of this ancient civilization.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

Abundant visual and textual materials exist for the study of ancient Egyptian religion, and copious scholarship has been devoted to defining and understanding the beliefs and practices of this civilization, which endured and flourished for so many millennia. Religion was an absolutely fundamental aspect of Egyptian civilization throughout its lengthy history, influencing and reflecting all aspects of life from politics to social structure to daily routine. A concern for stability, the performance of proper actions to maintain the cosmic and earthly order (*maat*), belief in an afterlife, and the veneration of a multitude of diverse deities all characterize religious beliefs and practices in ancient Egypt. Ancient Egyptian religion has been described as being stable and conservative but at the same time also highly fluid and flexible. "Religious beliefs did not remain constant over the three millennia but were continually reinterpreted."[12] Nevertheless, in general it may be said that the core beliefs of the ancient Egyptians were centered around the concept of life after death, the veneration of multiple deities, and the role of the rulers (pharaohs) in relationship to these deities. Egyptian religion represents "a very complicated and sophisticated set of . . . beliefs . . . a highly developed concept of the divine."[13]

The complexity of ancient Egyptian religion is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that there exists no one standard theological text or set of scriptures that provides consistent and fundamental details about their ideas and beliefs. "Egyptian religion was not one of revelation; its doctrines were not ascribed to any one divinely inspired intermediary and teacher akin to Christ, Mohammed, or the Buddha."[14] Thus, a variety of texts, popular during different eras and promulgated in different regions of ancient Egypt, include diverse creation myths, different cosmologies, and different pantheons of major and lesser deities. This only "serves to emphasize the interconnected and yet seemingly contradictory system of beliefs referred to as ancient Egyptian religion."[15]

Gods and Goddesses

Egyptian religion was polytheistic, but it is important to always bear in mind that "what we categorize as polytheism was for the ancients a way of seeing all forms of life and nature as sacred."[16] Some Egyptian deities were closely associated with natural phenomena such as air, water, earth, darkness, the sun, moon, and various stars. Other deities were associated with abstract ideas such as divine speech, divine energy, and divine knowledge. Some gods and goddesses were worshiped in specific regions, whereas others were of more widespread or national veneration. Some were associated with specific cult centers, such as the temples of Thebes, Memphis, Edfu, and Heliopolis. Others deities

became prominent because of their veneration by specific pharaohs or dynasties. Some deities were associated with events in human life, such as birth and death. Funerary deities such as Anubis (overseer of embalming rituals) and Osiris (lord of the underworld) were especially important. Some deities were associated with specific professions (such as Thoth, the patron of scribes) or with events such as farming and the harvest. Other deities were worshiped in households or as personal protectors. The associations of the multitude of Egyptian deities were vast and diverse.

Egyptian deities were frequently visualized in human (anthropomorphic) form, in animal (zoomorphic) form, in the form of composite animals (combining features of more than one animal), and in zooanthropomorphic form (combining human and animal features and qualities.) As the deities were seen as symbols or manifestations of divine forces and powers, and the "Egyptians believed that some mystery was necessary to preserve the dimensions of divine power, their visual images and written descriptions of the gods pointed only to some aspects of the deities and were not intended to detail every aspect."[17] Moreover, the attributes and forms of various deities were often blended, or syncretized, representing a process of ongoing transformation. Many deities shared their roles and associations with other deities.

Egyptian society was highly stratified, and religious practices reflect this as well. The "religious practices of the privileged classes differed markedly from those of the mass of ordinary people. . . . Egyptian temples were intended not for popular worship but to provide a place where the king could commune with the gods . . . The abstract religious concepts associated with large temples would have been incomprehensible to the majority of ordinary people."[18] Yet the state religion (represented by the temple, priests, and pharaohs) and popular religion (represented by the day-to-day practices of the common people) were closely interrelated. "The two existed side by side in harmony, as the various minor deities worshiped by the people were believed to be local manifestations of either the overall state god or a god of one of the major cults."[19]

Although Egyptian religion was generally characterized by a polytheistic embrace of diverse cults, attempts to change these traditions were dramatically and briefly undertaken during the reign of the pharaoh Amenhotep IV—better known as Akhenaten (ca. 1352–ca. 1336 BCE). During this time, often known as the Armana period (after the modern name of the city he founded as his capital, Akhetaten), the ruler promoted sole worship of Aten, the god of the sun. Aten was one of the several forms of the sun god previously venerated in Egypt; however, Akhenaten disallowed worship of any other deities in favor of the supreme Aten. He took on the name Akhenaten ("Beneficence of the Aten") and called his new capital Akhetaten ("Horizon of the Aten"). This revolutionary form of monotheism represented a dramatic break with the past as well as a notable dismantling of the priestly offices. Akhenaten declared himself to be the sole priest of Aten and the only intermediary through whom the deity could be approached. There is much speculation about the nature of

what surely were both complex theological and political motivations on the part of Akhenaten.

His era also represents a brief change in style in Egyptian artistic traditions. New facial and figural types appear in art, especially in representations of the pharaoh himself, as well as his family. Akhenaten appears to have had a unique physiognomy, with an elongated head, paunchy stomach, and enlarged hips. He is often portrayed in scenes with the sun disk, Aten, from which issue multiple light rays terminating in hands holding ankh symbols (a T-shaped form with a looped top—the symbol of life) (see Figure 3.1). Akhenaten's new religion was short-lived, and of little lasting influence. Soon after his death, the ancient traditions quickly returned.

The Pharaoh and the Priests

Akhenaten's declaration of himself as the sole priest of the one god, Aten, was certainly a revolutionary break with previous Egyptian practices. Even so, throughout the lengthy history of civilization in Egypt, secular and spiritual authority were always closely intertwined. This is perhaps best seen in the prominent role played by the pharaohs, who functioned not only as earthly authorities but also as critical links to the divine realms. It is often said that the Egyptian pharaohs were venerated as living divinities, as gods resident on



Figure 3.1 Pharaoh Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti with their daughters, limestone relief, ca. 1345 BCE. Berlin: Agyptisches Museum. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY

earth. In some periods, this was certainly the case. Particular pharaohs, such as the extremely powerful and long-lived Ramses II, often called Ramses the Great (ca. 1279–ca. 1212 BCE) were especially directive in promoting their divine status. Ramses II actively encouraged worship of himself, based at his cult temple in Abu Simbel, which was adorned with numerous impressive images of himself as the living god (see Figure 3.2).

Nevertheless, the Egyptians' perception of the pharaohs and their status underwent several changes during the millennia of their history. It would probably be most accurate to say that kingship, in itself, was regarded as a divine office. The pharaohs were clearly mortal human beings like all others, but in holding the divine office of ruler, they had a unique relationship with the gods and a critical role to play in maintaining stability and order in the earthly realms as well. The pharaohs combined human and divine attributes and associations while on earth, and they were believed to become fully identified with the divine after death. This is well attested throughout Egyptian history by the vast number of tombs and mortuary temples created for the afterlife well-being of the rulers.

The pharaoh was also considered to be "nominally the high priest of every god in every temple throughout the country."[20] Pharaohs thus functioned simultaneously as the head of the state and of the church. "It was the role of the king to ensure the beneficence of the gods and thereby ensure peace, harmony, and prosperity in Egypt. The king was essential to universal order, and it was his duty to maintain *maat* at all times."[21] Functionally however, the pharaoh



Figure 3.2 Great Temple of Ramses II, Abu Simbel, Egypt, ca. 1279–1213 BCE. 2009 Jupiterimages Corporation.

could not be present at all temples and ritual sites, so priests were needed to carry out the many rites associated with Egyptian religious practices.

The word *priest* is customarily used to translate the ancient Egyptian term *hem netjer,* which more accurately means "servant of the god." Temples in ancient Egypt were often extremely vast complexes and involved the employment of hundreds of people as servants of deities. Many of these people were involved with various duties required to maintain the prosperity and security of the temples. Temples served as important economic centers for their regions. Workshops, storerooms, libraries, and schools were often associated with temples. The rituals specifically involved with tending to the needs of the god, such as the daily rites and offerings, were carried out only by the elite and specially trained among the many priests. In addition, each temple had a high priest, an office that was usually held by royal appointment. High priests acted on behalf of the pharaoh and they

> had closer contact with the cult statue of the god than anyone else in the temple complex. It is likely that only the High Priest would have been allowed to stand before the image of the god in the shrine. Temple reliefs illustrate what was expected of the High Priest, but because the presence of the king was still considered necessary in the temple, even if only symbolically, it was the ruler who was shown performing the rituals.[22]

Although fewer in number than men, women also served as priestesses in the temples. The title *hemet netjer* ("wife of the god") was used to describe these important women. They were often married to priests, and some women also served as high priests, especially in association with the worship of the goddess Hathor, a fertility deity.

Death and the Afterlife

Some of the oldest surviving archaeological evidence from ancient Egypt indicates that concerns for proper burial and hopes for life after death developed extremely early. A belief in the afterlife is a key component in understanding Egyptian religion and a factor that is consistently demonstrated in visual and textual evidence throughout the millennia. To some modern minds, it might seem as if the Egyptians had an almost morbid fascination with death, but it may be far more accurate to see this within the context of the unique geographic situation of this civilization based on the banks of the Nile river. In ancient times, the yearly floods of the Nile brought renewed fertility to the land, and represented a cycle of hoped-for regeneration of resources after periods of inundation. Witnessing these cycles surely must have inspired the ancient Egyptians to regard the processes of birth and death as consistently renewed and naturally occurring events, operative in all related arenas of human, plant, and animal life. Just as the fertile soil of the Nile was refreshed yearly, so could humans and animals expect to be renewed in the afterlife.

It is important to note, however, that the Egyptian belief in the afterlife is not the same as the concept of reincarnation. Other ancient world religions (such as Hinduism) visualize the cycle of death and rebirth as being repeatable through a series of potential stages in a progressive (or digressive) sequence. The ancient Egyptians, in contrast, appear to have believed that one's life on earth was followed by an eternal afterlife, which ideally mirrored the finest aspects of one's earthly life. Appropriate and ethical behavior in one's earthly life would ensure one of successful passage to the eternal afterlife.

It appears that the ancient Egyptians, regardless of social class, believed in the afterlife. However, the elite members of the society were those who were best able to afford grand burials and make elaborate preparations for their afterlife experiences. It was believed that "the journey into the Afterlife was no mean feat—all manner of demons and hazardous obstacles had to be bypassed and overcome."[23] Thus, much textual and visual evidence demonstrates the importance of proper preparation for death as well as the challenges to be faced in the passage to the afterlife. The afterlife was visualized as an idyllic version of life on earth, a realm in which individuals would become closer to the gods. The pharaohs, of course, were necessarily expected to enter into a happy afterlife in eternal communion with the deities with whom they were already closely associated, thus continuing to ensure order and balance in the world and cosmos.

The practice of mummification (embalming and wrapping the bodies of the deceased) was an important aspect of Egyptian funerary religion, afforded primarily by the wealthy classes.

> In very early times, the Egyptians buried their dead without coffins in simple pit graves dug into the desert sands. The hot, dry sand, which came into contact with the bodies, desiccated them and acted as a natural preservative. The remarkable preservation of these natural "mummies" must have been observed by the ancient Egyptians and may have contributed to early religious beliefs in survival after death.[24]

The concern for preserving the body to ensure the afterlife ultimately developed into the elaborate process of mummification, which involved specific rituals and a series of stages of purification. For those able to afford the most elaborate techniques, the process often involved removal of selected internal organs (subject to decay and putrefaction), which were embalmed separately and placed near the body in special vessels, known as canopic jars. These were often decorated with images of the deities associated with these internal organs, the human headed Imset (for the liver), the baboon-headed Hapy (for the lungs), the jackal-headed Duamutef (for the stomach), and the falcon-headed Kebehsenuf (for the intestines) (see Figure 3.3).

The body of the deceased was believed to serve as a vessel for the spirit, soul, or "etheric double" of the body, the *ka*.[25] "The *ka* was thought to come into being at the birth of an individual. . . . *ka* is often translated as 'spirit' or 'vital



Figure 3.3 Painted wooden canopic jars, ca. 700 BCE. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

force,' as in the creative life force of an individual . . . It was believed that the *ka* required food and drink, so offerings were made to it for as long as possible after death."[26] Additionally, the *ba* (often translated as "soul") and the *akh* (often translated as "spirit") were closely related components in the afterlife of the deceased. The *ba* "was considered more mobile than the *ka* and it enabled the dead person to move about in the Afterlife."[27] The *akh* was also believed to fly to the otherworld in the form of a human-headed bird. Great care was taken to ensure that all elements of the spirit or soul of the deceased were acceptably prepared and would thus continue to exist in the afterlife.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

A vast majority of the surviving art and monumental architecture produced in ancient Egypt was designed for religious purposes. The hierarchical nature of the society, the emphasis on death and the afterlife, and the importance of maintaining the cosmic order permeated all aspects of Egyptian society. The great tombs built for the pharaohs, the massive temples built for the major gods and goddesses, and the shrines created for local deities all give evidence of the pervasive nature of Egyptian religion. The many surviving works of art from ancient Egypt more than indicate that "the role of representational art was closely interwoven with the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians and often the one cannot be understood without reference to the other."[28]

Even so, to modern eyes, the arts of ancient Egypt can often seem impenetrable, confusing, and conventionally stylized. Most all figures of gods or humans or animals are presented in profile; they appear to follow standard conventions but at the same time may include "an embarrassment of iconographic riches," in the form of signs and symbols, which are difficult to decipher and understand, even for specialists.[29] The Egyptians appear to have developed their artistic conventions very early (in the Pre-Dynastic period) and maintained them—with slight divergence—throughout their lengthy history. This is not to say that Egyptian art is static and unchanging, but it surely is the case that the forms of visual presentation demonstrate a remarkable coherency.

Tombs and the Funerary Arts

Surely, among the most well-known monuments from ancient Egypt are the pyramids at Giza (see Figure 3.4). These remarkable structures, which date to the Old Kingdom period (ca. 2500 BCE) have fascinated travelers and scholars for centuries. They were considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, and to the present day continue to be a powerful symbol of the achievements of ancient Egyptian civilization.

The architectural form of the pyramid actually represents the culmination of a series of earlier stages. Rectangular stone or brick structures known as mastabas (from the Arabic word for "bench") were originally erected over grave sites. A series of these platforms placed atop each other in diminishing sizes



Figure 3.4 The Pyramids at Giza, Egypt, ca. 2500 BCE. 2009 Jupiterimages Corporation.

led to the stepped pyramid form. The smooth sides of the pyramids at Giza (originally encased in gleaming white limestone) also mimic the shape of the *ben-ben* stone, a symbol of the sun god, Ra. "Both ben-ben and pyramid may have symbolized the rays of the sun . . . the pyramid is thus the immaterial made material. . . . a simulacrum of both the mound of primeval earth and the weightless rays of sunlight, a union of heaven and earth that transforms the divine king and ensures the divine rule."[30]

The pyramids at Giza took about 75 years to construct. They served as tombs for the pharaohs Khufu (r. ca. 2551–2528 BCE), Khafre (r. ca. 2520—2494 BCE), and Menkaure (r. ca. 2490–2472 BCE). They also served as symbols for the sun god Ra. The pharaohs were considered to be sons and incarnations of Ra; thus their monumental tombs with attached mortuary temples (for offerings and rituals) were the centerpieces of a vast complex of other related structures, ramps, causeways, smaller pyramids, and mastabas of other royals and nobles as well.

The conspicuous nature of the pyramids and the vast amounts of treasures contained deep within them, in the tomb chambers of the pharaohs, provided immediate temptations for grave robbers. This was such a serious problem that although pyramids on a smaller scale continued to be constructed periodically through ancient Egyptian history, new forms of tombs became popular after the Old Kingdom period. Most notable are the rock-cut tombs tunneled deep into cliffs in the Valley of the Kings near Thebes.[31] Thebes became an important city especially during the New Kingdom period, and the remote Valley of the Kings contains the burial sites of numerous rulers. These take the form of chambers and corridors tunneled into the rocky cliffs. Although great efforts were often made to conceal the entrances to these tombs, they were ultimately robbed of all, if not major portions of, their grave goods with the exception of the Tomb of Tutankhamun (ca. 1336–ca. 1327 BCE).

The discovery and excavation of the Tomb of Tutankhamun in the early 1920s was a major event in 20th-century archaeology and caused another great revival of interest in all things Egyptian. The wonderful things discovered within this tomb yet again demonstrate the surpassing concern of the ancient Egyptians in making provisions for the afterlife, guaranteeing that the deceased would continue to enjoy the comforts of earthly life, and ensuring the preservation of the deceased body.

King Tut (as he is known popularly today) was buried with immense riches in spite of the fact that he was a short-lived and relatively minor ruler. His mummy was placed within an elaborate sarcophagus in a gold coffin, within two other gilded wooden coffins. A golden mask was placed over the face of the mummy (see Figure 3.5). Richly decorated furniture (beds, chairs, couches, and stools), lamps, torches, musical instruments, swords, daggers, shields, archery equipment, food containers, wine vessels, and writing and gaming equipment were all found in the tomb. The colorful wall paintings depict Tut's journey to the afterlife and his meetings with numerous deities. A vast amount of outstanding and lavish jewelry was also provided for the ruler in the after-

life. Many of these examples are enriched with symbols and images that reinforce the message of his kingly divinity and rule, such as the elaborate pectoral (large pendant) of gold and precious stones (see Plate 5). The king is shown in a disk at the top being crowned by two deities. This moon disk is supported by the lunar crescent, which sits atop a boat holding the symbolic eye of Horus. This in turn is supported by a winged scarab (symbol of the sun god) holding the lotus and papyrus symbols of upper and lower Egypt. Two cobras wearing solar disks symbolize Egypt's strength. The overall impression given by the many objects enshrined with this deceased ruler is one of power and confidence, themes that are repeated in Egyptian art generally.



Figure 3.5 Gold Mask of Tutankhamun, ca. 1336–1327 BCE. Cairo: Egyptian Museum. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Temples

Ancient Egyptian temples fall into two main and related categories: mortuary temples and temples dedicated to the worship of specific deities. Mortuary temples functioned as places where rituals were performed and offerings were made to deceased rulers, whereas temples dedicated to specific deities functioned as cult centers and dwelling places for the gods. It has been remarked that "the traditional division of temples into the categories of 'mortuary' and 'divine' is a false one [because] the functions and symbolic characteristics of all Egyptian temples were both too varied and too intertwined to support this distinction," thus, it is wise to see these two types of temples as closely related aspects of ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and practices.[32]

"The beginnings of the temple in Egypt are as shrouded in mystery as any aspect of that civilization's ancient origins."[33] Recent excavations at the site of Heirakonpolis (ca. 3500 BCE) have revealed evidence of an enclosed rectangular structure and shrine for the falcon god Horus, a deity closely associated with the later pharaohs. Horus was also worshiped at the Early Dynastic site of Abydos, where ancient festivals in honor of the rulers appear to have taken place as well. This demonstrates the early and close association of the pharaohs with the deities, as is also shown, for example, in the mortuary temples of the Old Kingdom rulers who were entombed in the great pyramids at Giza as incarnations of the sun god Ra.

Hundreds of Egyptian temples were constructed through the long duration of the civilization, and study of these structures is often complicated by the fact that many continued in use for centuries, and were progressively altered and enlarged by successions of pharaohs whose relationship with the deities required their continued attention to these structures.

> As the interface between the divine and human spheres, the Egyptian temple served as a theatre in which symbolic ritual dramas were enacted. Here the myriad gods and goddesses of Egyptian belief were fed, clothed and reassured that justice, order and balance were being preserved through the ritual services performed by the pharaoh and the priests who functioned as his appointed agents. In return, the gods gave life to the land and upheld Egypt's ordained place in the cosmos. In one sense, the Egyptian temple was the source of power by which all of Egyptian society ran.[34]

EXAMPLES

The Temples of Amun at Luxor and Karnak

The related temples at Luxor and Karnak are extremely impressive testimonials to the significance and continuity of religious beliefs and practices in ancient Egypt (see Figures 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8). Located on the east bank of the Nile River less than two miles distant from one another, both temples were begun during the Middle Kingdom period but underwent centuries of rebuilding and additions so that the majority of what can be seen today at these vast complexes primarily dates to the New Kingdom period and especially to the prosperous era of the 18th Dynasty (ca. 1550–ca. 1295 BCE). Typical of Egyptian temple complexes, the many buildings were designed to provide not only facilities for the worship of the sun god Amun (or Amun-Ra) but also facilities for scholarship and priestly training, workshops for art production, libraries and archives, store rooms, and provisions for the various economic functions performed by temples. A series of pharaohs contributed to the enlargement and enrichment of these temples over the centuries, adding courtyards, obelisks, shrines, corridors, gates (pylons), numerous statues and relief carvings, and halls (some with multitudes of columns known as hypostyle halls) so that the effect of these monumental complexes is quite awesome in scale and extent. Indeed, the temple at Karnak is said to be the largest temple complex ever constructed in human history, covering close to 250 acres.

Both temples were designed to function as residences for the sun god and to facilitate veneration of this deity. The much larger temple at Karnak was considered the official residence of the god, while the more compact temple at Luxor was a site that the god visited symbolically, once a year, in a grand pageant known as the Opet festival, in which the cult statues of Amun, his wife, Mut, and their son, Khonsu, were taken out of the temple and placed in highly decorated boats for their ceremonial journey on the Nile to the temple

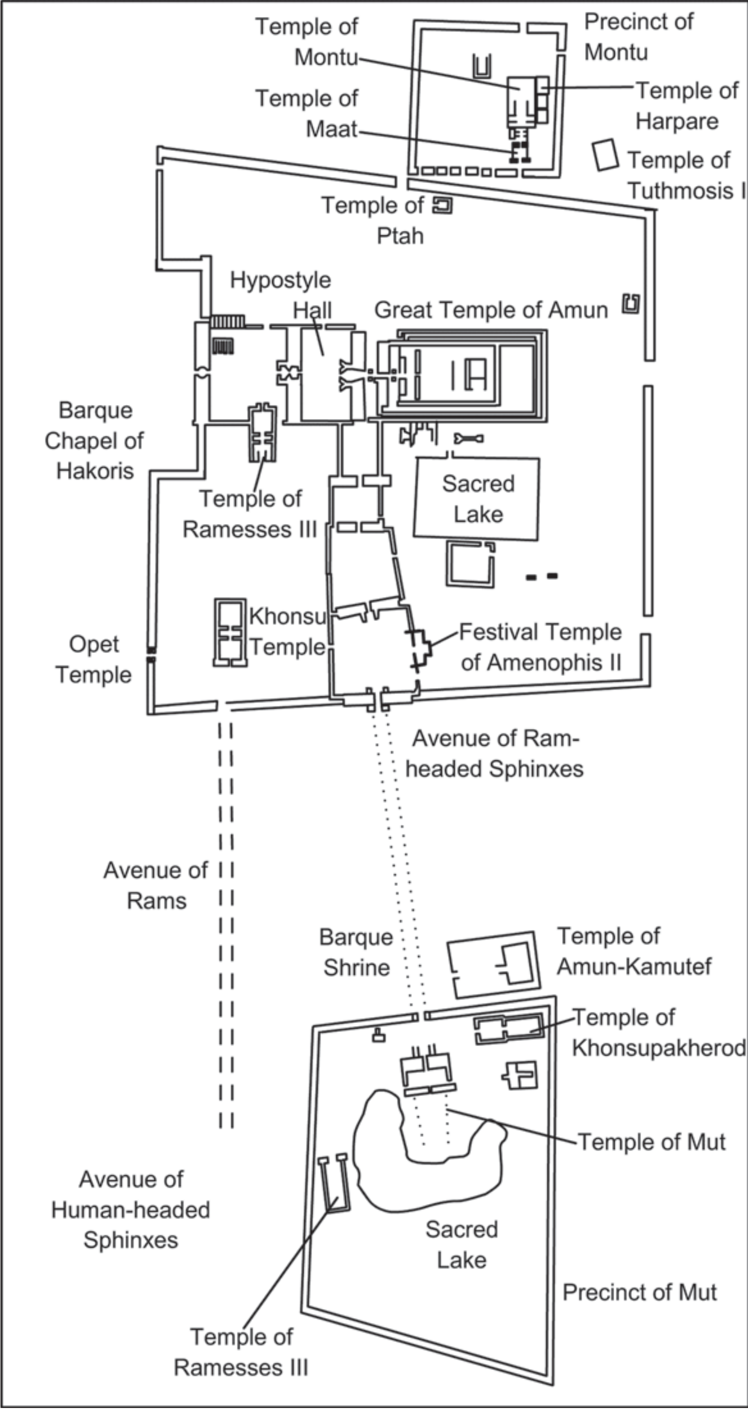


Figure 3.6 Plan of the Temple of Amun, Karnak, Egypt, begun 15th century BCE. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.



Figure 3.7 Temple of Amun, Karnak, Egypt, 14th to 13th century BCE. Holgs / Dreamstime.com.



Figure 3.8 Temple of Amun, Karnak, Egypt, 14th century BCE. Cmvsm / Dreamstime.com.

at Luxor, where they resided for a short period. The two temples are also linked by an avenue of sphinxes that was used for ceremonial and processional purposes as well.

The Opet festival became especially popular in the New Kingdom period and could last up to several weeks. Festivities included processions, dancing, singing, music, acrobatics, sacrificial gifts, and offerings, all for the enjoyment of the gods. The festival was associated with birth, renewal, and divine vitality, critical for the prosperity and stability of the country. Occasions such as these grand festivals were opportunities for the public to witness and participate in some capacities; however, the high degree of stratification in Egyptian society is also reflected in the religious practices and temple layouts. As dwellings for the gods, the temples mirrored the hierarchy of the society. Access to the inner areas and private shrine rooms, where the gods actually resided, was possible only for the pharaohs and the priests.

The Pharaoh-Queen Hatshepsut

Most Egyptian pharaohs were men. Although the ancient Egyptians worshiped many female deities, and women appear to have been highly esteemed

and played significant roles in Egyptian society—they functioned as priestesses and are frequently illustrated in art in positions of prominence—the role of the pharaoh was traditionally a male office.[35] A notable exception to this took place during the reign of Queen Hatshepsut (ca. 1479–ca. 1458 BCE), who ruled Egypt for over 20 years, first as regent for her young nephew/step-son (Tuthmosis III, ca. 1479–1425 BCE), and, after declaring herself king, co-ruling with him for another 14 years while maintaining the position of supreme royal authority.

Early in her reign, she began to supervise the construction of an impressive mortuary temple for herself, which also served as a site for her to worship the gods during her lifetime (see Figure 3.9). Work on this impressive monument took upwards of 15 years. It stands at the base of the cliffs at Deir el-Bahari, opposite the Nile from the Temple of Amun at Karnak. It is one of the best preserved of New Kingdom royal funerary temples and includes shrines to Amun, Hathor, and Anubis, as well as memorials of Hatshepsut and her father, Thutmose I (r. 1524–1518 BCE). Distinctive in some elements of style and layout, it was designed in multiple ascending levels with three broad colonnaded courtyards linked by ramps, and was originally approached along a causeway lined with sphinxes. The queen stated that she built the temple as a garden for the god Amun, hence, in her time the courtyards would have been lovely garden areas filled with exotic and fragrant shrubs and trees.

Numerous statues, paintings, and reliefs depict the queen and her achievements, with an emphasis on her rightful and divinely ordained position as pharaoh. In some instances, she is shown in male form, wearing all the traditional



Figure 3.9 Mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahari, Egypt, ca. 1479–1458 BCE. 2009 Jupiterimages Corporation.



Figure 3.10 Queen Hatshepsut with the Goddess Seshat, relief, Red Chapel of Hatshepsut, Karnak, Egypt ca. 1479–1458 BCE. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

regalia of male kingship (including an elaborate headdress and official false beard) and engaging in all the official activities associated with pharaonic duties. She was a great patron of the arts and added her contributions to the temple at Karnak as well, including several obelisks and a chapel containing reliefs depicting her as a crowned male ruler accompanied by various deities (see Figure 3.10). The close relationship of the rulers and the gods, the importance of maintaining power and stability, and the concern for perpetuity in the afterlife are all traditional themes in Egyptian art well demonstrated by the works associated with the remarkable queen-pharaoh Hatshepsut.

The *Papyrus of Ani* (*Book of the Dead*), ca. 1275–1250 BCE

The *Papyrus of Ani* is an excellent and well-studied example of a funerary scroll containing text and illustrations to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead.* It is made of papyrus—the typical writing material of ancient Egypt—created from the stalks of the reedlike papyrus plant commonly found on the banks of the Nile. The scroll is slightly more than 1 foot high and was originally about 78 feet long; it was cut into 37 sheets in the late 19th century after its discovery in Thebes and its purchase by the British Museum (where it remains today) (see Plate 6).

Various versions of the *Book of the Dead* became extremely popular in ancient Egypt during the New Kingdom period. These illustrated scrolls were customarily placed within the coffin or tomb of the deceased and contain texts and pictures offering guidance for the afterlife. The *Book of the Dead* represents a very lengthy tradition of funerary literature in ancient Egypt. During the Old Kingdom era, pyramid texts were inscribed in royal tombs giving directions to the ruler and his family for proper conduct and what to expect in the afterlife. Later on, from about 2100 BCE, coffin texts became popular, inscribed within sarcophagi. By the New Kingdom period, coffin texts were gradually replaced by the *Book of the Dead.* The *Papyrus of Ani* dates to the New Kingdom period, ca. 1275–1250 BCE, and was produced for an important scribe of Thebes, named Ani (or Any). It is written in cursive-style hieroglyphs and extensively illustrated with painted scenes showing Ani's after-death experiences.

The vignette shown represents a critical moment in Ani's journey. He and his wife Thutu (or Tutu) are depicted on the left side, reverently approaching the central scene of the jackal-headed god Anubis who is weighing Ani's heart. For the ancient Egyptians, "the heart was considered to be the seat of the emotions and the intellect . . . the Egyptian equivalent of the mind."[36] The weighing of the heart represents "the judgment of a person's moral worth as the balancing of his heart against the feather of Maat, the goddess who personified truth, justice and order."[37] In this significant moment of Ani's transition from this world to the afterlife, "the delicacy of the necessary equipoise of moral worth contained in the heart meant that one's sins must be feather-light."[38] Successful passing of this test ensured that the deceased would be allowed to enter the afterlife, rather than dying a second death and becoming nonexistent, by being fed to the hybrid creature on the right side of the scene. This is Ammit ("who swallows the dead")—with attributes of a crocodile, lion, dog, and hippopotamus. Ammit sits behind the ibis-headed god Thoth, who oversees the rituals and records the judgment. Thoth is also symbolized by the small baboon sitting on top of the scales. Numerous other symbolic figures appear in the scene. By the base of the scales appears Shai, above his head the prone figure of Meskhenet is depicted, and two female figures (Meskhenet and Renenutut) stand behind Shai. All of these are various personifications of fate. The human-headed bird standing on a small shrine, eagerly watching the weighing scene, represents Ani's soul. A row of seated deities appear in a horizontal register at the top of the scene. This is the great tribunal of gods and goddesses, including Ra, Nut, Isis, Horus, and Hathor. They all hold scepters, representing strength and good fortune. The surrounding hieroglyphic texts enjoin Ani's heart to be peaceful and truthful "so that it will not act as a witness against Ani in the weighing ceremony."[39] While further trials await Ani in the afterworld (illustrated in copious other vignettes of the scroll) this judgment scene is among the most significant events customarily illustrated in the *Book of the Dead* and other media.

The Sacred Cat (Goddess Bastet), Bronze Statuette, after 600 BCE

Images of cats appear frequently in ancient Egyptian art, in hieroglyphs, wall paintings, and relief carvings in tombs and temples. The earliest feline images have been dated to the Old Kingdom period, during which time cats were domesticated in Egypt. By the second millennium BCE, it appears that domestic cats had become important members of Egyptian households in all levels of society. They were useful for their roles as catchers of snakes, rodents, and other vermin, and they were cherished for their companionship.

Animals of all sorts played a role of supreme significance in ancient Egyptian life and thought. "Just like humans, they were one of the fundamental elements of creation. And they were also the visible signs of primeval forces that it was essential both to recognize and to propitiate."[40] For the ancient Egyptians, the

human and animal realms were regarded as a largely harmonious continuum in which neither was dominant or of greater importance than the other. "It is precisely in this context that animals assume their omnipresent nature, as the receptacles and visible signs of formidable and largely inexplicable powers, as the expression of an aspect—alongside rocks, plants and human beings—of the universal life force."[41]

Typically, the ancient Egyptian deities were linked and associated with animals. The solar deity Horus often appears with the head of a falcon; the god Sobek may have the head of a crocodile; Anubis is often shown with the head of a jackal; and the goddess Sekhmet was associated with the lioness—a symbol of great strength and power. The cat goddess, Bastet, represents an evolution in this feline imagery. First shown with the head of a lioness, eventually her form became that of a female cat. Unlike the dangerous and unpredictable Sekhmet, Bastet's nature was generally seen as more peaceful and gentle. Her worship became especially popular in the later periods of Egyptian history and was particularly centered in the city of Bubastis (or Basta), an ancient site in the eastern Nile delta. Although the foundations of the city and the cult of Bastet have been dated back to the Old Kingdom period, her worship flourished during the late and Ptolemaic periods (eighth through first century BCE) when "the festival of the goddess Bastet at Bubastis became one of the largest and most popular in the country" with hundreds of thousands of worshipers attending the annual event.[42] The cult of Bastet was not restricted to Bubastis; she was also celebrated in Thebes, Memphis, and elsewhere.



Figure 3.11 The Sacred Cat Goddess Bastet, bronze statuette, after 600 BCE. London: British Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

During these centuries, enormous quantities of small bronze statuettes depicting the cat goddess were produced (see Figure 3.11). Many of these were given by devotees to Bastet shrines and temples. "It was a common custom in late Egypt to present a small monument to a temple, perhaps to commemorate a pilgrimage made on the occasion of a religious festival or as an expression of gratitude to the god for past favours or in expectation of such favours in the future."[43]

The example illustrated is one of the largest and most well-known among the thousands that survive.[44] It stands slightly over 16 inches tall and depicts a slim, alert, and elegantly bejeweled cat wearing a gold nose ring and gold earrings (which may be

later replacements of original jewelry) and an elaborate collar with a pendant showing the *wedjat* or *wadjit* eye—the eye of Horus. This symbolic eye with drop and spiral pattern imitates the markings of a falcon and was one of the most popular protective motifs in ancient Egypt. A winged scarab beetle (symbol of the sun god and regeneration) is inscribed in silver on the chest of the cat. The eye sockets would have originally been fitted with glass or stone eyes. Although much repaired and restored, this graceful statuette serves as an excellent example of ancient Egyptian artistic sophistication and the veneration of the divine in nature.

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Religion in Ancient and Classical Greece and Rome

A great many literary works and examples of visual art and architecture survive today that appear to provide more than adequate, if not copious, material for the study of the religious beliefs and practices of ancient and classical Greece and Rome. Many students of Western civilization are familiar with the names of the major deities revered by the Greeks and Romans, such as: Aphrodite/Venus—the goddess of love and beauty; Dionysus/Bacchus—the god of wine and revelry; Athena/Minerva—the goddess of wisdom and warfare; and Zeus/Jupiter—the king of the gods. Epic literary sagas, such as the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* of the ancient Greek Homeric tradition, and the *Aeneid* of the Roman author Virgil (70–19 BCE), have, for centuries, formed the core of Western and European-focused curriculums devoted to the study of the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome as representatives of the Western heritage. Examples of religious architecture from ancient Greece (such as the Parthenon in Athens) and examples of Roman religious architecture (such as the Pantheon in Rome) are often presented and studied as exemplars of the achievements, values, and core beliefs of these peoples.

Copious scholarship has been devoted, for centuries, to studies of the art, architecture, history, mythology, religion, and politics of the ancient Greeks and Romans. This leads, not illogically, to the impression that a great deal is securely known about these ancient cultures. On the one hand, this is certainly true. Virtually all—major and minor—aspects of Greek and Roman civilization have been painstakingly scrutinized by scholarly specialists in a vast range of academic disciplines. This work continues to flourish intensely today. It may be the case, however, that the very sense of familiarity and confidence gleaned

from this voluminous (and often contentious) scholarship has led to some standardization and repetition of theories and approaches. As research continues to flourish, it is often a wonderful twist of scholarly irony that the more knowledge that appears to be gleaned may actually result in less being truly known—or, at least, less generally agreed on. Such a paradox was much appreciated by the ancient Athenian philosopher Socrates (ca. 470–339 BCE), who claimed that true wisdom ultimately rests in awareness of one's ignorance. Even students who feel already very familiar with the architectural monuments and the epic mythological tales associated with Greek and Roman religious beliefs (as well as students less familiar with this material), may well profit by another look at these ancient and influential cultures.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

For purposes of this chapter, the discussion will concentrate largely on the historic eras of ancient Greece and Rome, rather than the prehistoric periods associated with the Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean cultures (some of which material is covered in chapter 1, "Prehistoric Belief Systems").

Following the downfall of Mycenaean civilization in Greece in the 13th century BCE and several subsequent centuries of dark ages, ancient Greek history is traditionally traced in a series of stages from the eighth to first century BCE. These centuries are customarily subdivided into three main phases: the Archaic period (eighth through early fifth century BCE), the Classical period (early fifth through mid-fourth century BCE), and the Hellenistic period (fourth through first century BCE). Each period is associated with several key events, developments, and distinctive art styles.

The Archaic period is characterized by the development of the phonetic Greek alphabet, the creation of the Homeric epics, the development of the city-state (or polis) as the cornerstone of Greek civilization, and the foundation of the Olympic Games (late eighth century BCE). The Classical period is generally regarded as the peak of ancient Greek culture and art, although it was also marked by warfare, notably the Persian War of the early fifth century BCE (when the Greeks battled against the invading Persians) and the Peloponnesian War of the late fifth century BCE (when the city-states of Athens and Sparta fought each other). Toward the end of the Classical period, the Greek city-states were eventually conquered by Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BCE) whose son, Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) continued expansive territorial conquests until his premature death. The subsequent Hellenistic era, with the division of Alexander's empire into large territories controlled by different (and often conflicting) dynasties, came to an end with the Roman conquest of Ptolemaic Egypt in 30 BCE.

It is important to remember that the geographic range of ancient Greece—or Magna Graecia—far exceeds the confines of the modern day country of Greece.[1] In ancient times, mainland Greece, the Peloponnesus, and the numerous Greek

Aegean islands were only a section of the territories controlled or colonized by the Greek peoples. For example, the colonies of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) and southern Italy were also extremely important areas of the ancient Greek world.

The civilization of the Etruscans, based in central and northern Italy, overlaps historically with both Greek and Roman cultures. The origin of the Etruscans and their unique, largely still undeciphered language, remain mysterious. Etruscan civilization flourished, in a number of independent cities, during a time roughly corresponding with the Archaic period of the ancient Greeks, with whom they maintained much contact via trade and commerce. The Etruscans emulated many Greek art forms, although they also developed distinctive styles and architectural formats, many of which also provided a heritage for Roman art and architecture.

Rome was initially established as an Etruscan city in the middle of the eighth century BCE. In the late sixth century BCE, the last Etruscan king was expelled from Rome and a new form of constitutional government was established. During the first phase of Roman history (the Republic, 509–27 BCE) Rome eventually conquered all of ancient Etruria and ultimately all of the ancient Greek and Hellenistic territories. This massive expansion continued through the second major phase of Roman history, (the Empire, 27 BCE to late fifth century CE) when the vast Roman empire covered major sections of present-day western Europe, Greece, the Middle East, and Africa.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

The religious beliefs of the ancient Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans share some fundamental similarities. They were polytheistic and worshiped a number of different deities, both male and female. The ultimate origins of these deities and the beliefs surrounding them are complex matters of much scholarly speculation.[2] As in many other ancient polytheistic cultures, the deities were ultimately associated with elements of nature (such as earth, water, and sky) and observable natural phenomena (such as storms, wind, and rain). The development of specifically named deities, already found in the Mycenaean period, is even more than evident by the Archaic period, notably in the ancient Homeric epics in which the gods and goddesses have distinctive attributes and personalities. In epics such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* the deities are presented as being quite active in their interest in—as well as their influence on—human lives and events. “In Greek religion, the sacred interpenetrated the world of everyday life to a very high degree.”[3] The success or failure of human endeavors was believed to be influenced by divine favor (or disfavor) and, oftentimes, by divine caprice and whimsy as well. The deities who play major and minor roles in the Greek Homeric epics, and who also feature in numerous other later Roman literary works such as the *Aeneid* of Virgil and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE?), ultimately emerge as very humanlike, but immortal,

figures whose actions and desires mirror both the best and the worst of human personality traits. The deities "were by no means all good; their distinguishing quality was not goodness, but power."[4] It has been said that "Greek mythology always preferred human modes of expressing the divine."[5]

The aforementioned works are, however, not religious texts per se but rather literary creations in which the deities are described and in which they feature. They give important evidence about ancient religious beliefs, but these are not writings that were understood to be divine revelations (such as the Qur'an for Muslims, and as the Bible is considered to be by many Jews and Christians). "It would be mistaken to conclude that those myths belonged to [ancient] religion as a corpus of beliefs and certainties with the same standing as revelation in the religions that stem from the Bible . . . In no sense did the myths constitute dogmas."[6] There is no single book or set of sacred scriptures on which Greek, Etruscan, and Roman religion can be said to be based. While numerous texts describe the deities and speak of their roles and proper veneration, scholars must use some caution in attempting to understand the realities of ancient religious beliefs and actual practices based on these texts.

Many scholars believe that "before polytheism in Greece there was an era of monotheism" in which veneration of the divine feminine, or Earth/Mother Goddess, dominated.[7] The gradual supplanting of the Neolithic and Bronze Age Mother Goddess by the polytheistic pantheon most often associated with Greek and Roman religion appears to have taken place in the Archaic period of ancient Greece. Important literary works such as the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days* of Hesiod (eighth century BCE) provide "the primary source for our information about the Olympian gods and goddesses who came to form the core of the Greek pantheon."[8]

The Olympian Pantheon

Hesiod's *Theogony* describes generations of deities brought forth from the initial union of the earth/feminine and sky/masculine forces, which ultimately resulted in the 12 major divinities of the Greek pantheon.[9] Six of these deities were feminine, and six were masculine, with the male sky god, Zeus, serving as king of the deities and ruler of the universe.

Zeus was the god of power and generation; his symbol is the lightening bolt. The official wife of Zeus was Hera, the patroness of marriage and protector of social order. Zeus ruled the heavens while his brother, Poseidon, ruled the seas. Poseidon's symbol is the trident. The sister of Zeus, Demeter, symbolized fertility. Closely linked with the ancient Earth Mother, Demeter was widely worshiped in mystery rituals. Apollo, a son of Zeus, represented law, order, creativity, knowledge, and prophecy. The virginal sister of Apollo, Artemis, was associated with the moon, wild animals, and youthfulness. Ares was the god of war, whereas Aphrodite was the goddess of love, nature, beauty, and fruitfulness. Hermes, another son of Zeus, was the messenger god, associated with

spiritual guidance, sleep, dreams, prophecy, and revelation. Athena, a daughter of Zeus, was the goddess of wisdom, purity, and intellect, and she appears in many guises, often as a triumphant warrior maiden. Hestia was the goddess of the hearth, home, and social unity. Sometimes she is replaced in the pantheon by Dionysus (yet another son of Zeus), associated with revelry and lack of constraint. Dionysus was also widely worshiped in mystery/cultic rituals.

Apart from the 12 primary Olympian deities (so named as they were legendarily believed to reside on Mount Olympus), Greek myths are populated by a vast host of additional gods and goddesses, heroes, semidivine beings, centaurs, nymphs, and both beneficent and evil forces. The god of death and the underworld was Hades; the god of healing was Asclepius; Eros, the wanton and youthful love god is associated with Aphrodite; the Fates ruled human destiny, while the Furies served as forces of vengeance; the Muses inspired poetry, music, dance, and other creative achievements, while the three Graces represented beauty, gentleness, and friendship. The exploits and adventures of the semidivine hero Herakles feature prominently in art and literature.

The deities simultaneously and later venerated by the Etruscans and Romans have many counterparts to those of ancient Greece. Although relatively little is very clearly understood about Etruscan religious beliefs and practices, archaeological and later literary evidence indicates that several of the prominent Etruscan deities included gods such as Tinia (Zeus/Jupiter) and Apulu (Apollo), as well as goddesses such as Uni (Hera/Juno), Menvra (Athena/Minerva), and Artumes (Artemis/Diana).

By and large, the Roman pantheon of deities represent borrowings from the Greek and Etruscan plus additional figures as well. Some deities of ancient Greece were less popular among the Romans, whereas other lesser Greek deities became more widely venerated among the Romans. Especially as the vast Roman empire grew and expanded around the Mediterranean world and beyond, the Romans absorbed and assimilated many deities of a wide range of cultural origins. “As the Romans saw it, there were countless gods. They filled the whole known world. Some had made themselves known to the Romans . . . Other deities lived in foreign lands.”[10] Many of the myths and legends of the Greeks were retained and augmented by the Romans, and deities such as the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis, and the Persian god Mithra, were widely venerated at various times by certain segments of the Roman population. Roman religion may ultimately be seen as highly eclectic—with both public and private aspects.

A clash between the so-called public and private aspects of ancient Roman religious practices is generally associated with the growth and development of Christianity within the Roman empire in the first through third centuries CE (see chapter 10, “Christianity”). It is traditionally understood that the monotheistic Christians were persecuted by the Roman authorities because of their refusal to engage in public worship of the Roman gods as well as their refusal to accept and acknowledge the deified status of the emperors, a practice that had

began in the late first century BCE. Although the reasons for the persecution of Christians are extremely complex, one gains a sense that the maintenance of at least outward conformity to any variety of official/public/state religious practices during the Roman empire was paramount and considered to be an important duty and responsibility of Roman citizens.[11]

The fundamentally civic and communal nature of religious practices both in ancient Greece and Rome must be emphasized. Both Greek and Roman religion have been described as emphasizing *orthopraxy* (correct practice/performance) rather than *orthodoxy* (correct belief/opinion). In the Greek city-states, "it was the task of the noble Greek to [serve] the *polis* as a citizen. His duties were to fight if called upon, to debate the issues of the day, to serve in the assembly or in whatever position the *polis* might assign him, and most of all to support with his wealth the festivals and honors due to the gods."[12] Similarly, "religion as a communal relationship with the gods, and religion as a system of obligations stemming from that relationship" are critical defining features of Roman religion.[13] Both Greek and Roman religious practices were highly ritualistic, based on ceremonies and regularly held public festivals. Festal calendars naturally diverged from place to place and evolved over time. Some festivals were local and others were more widely celebrated. No absolutely universal civic religious calendar existed, although many festivals were held in accordance with natural yearly agricultural and seasonal activities. People also "took an active part in the religious festivals and obligations that concerned them within the context of a domestic cult or of the religions of smaller, local communities with the city."[14] Ritual sacrifices of animals (especially sheep, goats, and cattle), divination practices, the consulting of oracles, offerings of incense and libations, celebrations with feasts, processions, and athletic competitions in honor of the gods all characterize the religious practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans.[15]

Some of the most important festivals of ancient Greece included the regularly held Olympic Games in honor of the god Zeus at the site of Olympia (from the early eighth century BCE) and the Pythian Games in honor of the god Apollo at the great sanctuary at Delphi (from the early sixth century BCE). These were Panhellenic celebrations that took place every four years and were attended by Greeks from many different regions and city-states. The great Panathenaic festival of Athens, celebrated every four years in honor of the goddess Athena (from the middle of the sixth century BCE) was a local city festival of grand proportions that also included games and competitions among athletes from many regions of the Greek world.[16]

Among the vast number of festivals celebrated by the ancient Romans were annual events such as the spring Lupercalia (in honor of Lupa, the she-wolf, who legendarily suckled the infant founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus), the summer Consualia festival (in honor of the god Consus, who protected the harvest), and the extremely popular winter Saturnalia (in honor of the god Saturn—this festival was characterized by great merriment and reversal of traditional social roles).

Priests and priestesses conducted rituals associated with festivals and temples in ancient Greece "but never developed into a class of their own because of the lack of an institutional framework."[17] Indeed, "Greek religion might almost be called a religion without priests; there [was] no priestly caste as a closed group with fixed tradition, education, initiation, and hierarchy."[18] Even so, the leadership roles in Greek religious ceremonies were often assumed by members of various prominent families who traditionally oversaw specific rituals. Some positions were hereditary, others were by appointment or could be purchased. The number of years these positions could or might be held varied widely as well.

Although the roles of women in ancient Greece were largely restricted to domestic and child-bearing duties, "in one crucial area, that of religious practice, the barriers between women and public life were conspicuously breached."[19] Women participated quite fully in religious life in ancient Greece, and many recent studies have been devoted to the importance and prominence of priestesses.[20] Religious officials in ancient Rome were almost exclusively male, although an important exception to this were the priestesses of Vesta (or the Vestal Virgins) who tended the shrine and sacred fire of Vesta, the goddess of the home and hearth, at a special sanctuary in Rome.[21]

Although there is little doubt that "death was taken very seriously by the ancient Greeks and Romans,"[22] it is also clear that "no one explanation for death encompassed the whole Greco-Roman cultural ambience."[23] The shadowy underworld of Hades and the ghostly souls roaming netherworld regions such as the Elysian Fields feature prominently in early mythology; there are many literary works describing heroic journeys to (and returns from) the realms of the dead, as well as works describing the return of ghostly shades (both threatening and beneficent) to the realms of the living.[24] Even so, the concepts of the afterlife that developed in ancient Greece and Rome vary widely in specificity and detail—including the issues of after-death judgment and reward or punishment for earthly deeds. A concern for proper burial and funeral rites was demonstrated in both Greek and Roman practices, and the dead were commemorated in both private familial rites and larger community festivals. Although some scholars have claimed that the popularity of the mystery cults can be attributed to their offering of greater specificity about the afterlife, this is by no means clear or generally agreed.

Mystery Cults

Supplementing civic religious practices in ancient Greece and Rome were a number of mystery cults in which only initiates were allowed to fully participate.[25] These include the Eleusinian, Dionysian, Orphic, and Mithraic mysteries. The roots of several of these cults seem to be of very ancient origin, and many scholars believe they reflect practices of the prehistoric Aegean world (the Minoan and Mycenaean periods, if not earlier).

The Eleusinian mysteries, held in honor of the earth goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone (who was abducted into the underworld by Hades and who returned to earth after several months) celebrated regeneration and fertility, death and rebirth. Centered at the site of Eleusis, near Athens, the mystery rituals took place regularly—at least yearly—and attracted many followers.[26] Eleusis remained an extremely important cult and pilgrimage center under the Romans as well, until the sanctuary was closed under the direction of the Christian Roman emperor Theodosius in the late fourth century CE. Although much scholarship and archaeological work has been devoted to Eleusis and the ancient mystery rituals performed there, the exact nature of these rituals and their intended cathartic or transforming effect on participants remain matters of some speculation. Unlike civic religious ceremonies, the rituals of Eleusis (as other mystery cults) were hidden from noninitiates, and participants were vowed to secrecy. "Those involved in the mystery religions possessed secret knowledge which was transmitted through the special bond of membership."[27]

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Temples

In both Greece, Etruria, and Rome, the primary forms of religious architecture were temples dedicated to the gods and goddesses. Some sanctuaries were located in rural areas outside of cities. Cities of any size often had several temples dedicated to different deities. Numerous examples survive to the present day either in well-preserved or more fragmentary form. Major examples such as the fifth-century BCE Parthenon in Athens and the second-century CE Pantheon in Rome represent centuries of development in architectural construction methods and forms.

Many scholars concur that the horizontal, rectangular temple form that is most traditionally seen in both Greek and Roman religious architecture ultimately represents a lengthy development from the ancient Mycenaean Greek type of building known as the *megaron*, which primarily appears to have functioned as a royal audience hall and focal structure in Mycenaean palace-citadels. Excavations of Mycenaean sites such as Mycenae, Tiryns, and Pylos have uncovered the remains of *megaron* structures that, in general layout and format, resemble the later temple buildings of Archaic and Classical Greece.

Sacred sites in the pre-Classical period, with space marked out for religious purposes—often including a tree or grove, source of water, and an altar—have been uncovered in archaeological excavations. The careful siting of sanctuaries within the landscape has often been extolled as one of the most significant and aesthetically symbolic aspects of Greek architecture in general.[28] It is important to remember, however, that the gleaming white marble temples, which stand out with such impressive clarity in their settings today, were originally enriched with color. Traces of pigment found on the architectural and sculptural

elements of many temples indicate that they were originally much more colorful than their present appearance demonstrates.

All Greek temples use a trabeated system of construction with horizontal and vertical members (posts or columns supporting lintels or beams). The majority of Greek and Roman temples constructed in stone employ this format, which is ultimately based on timber (wood) building methods. Etruscan temples were constructed of wood (as the earliest Greek temples presumably were as well), hence evidence for the appearance of Etruscan temples must be gleaned from other sources, such as small clay models that demonstrate their form. Although Greek temples generally were constructed atop low stone platforms with steps surrounding on all four sides, Etruscan and Roman temples generally have simply one flight of steps on the front leading to their entrances. Greek and Roman temples may be dated and categorized as per the appearance of specific details of their vertical columns and capitals (topping the columns) and horizontal entablatures (sections of the structure supported by columns). The development of different styles or orders of classical architecture took place over many centuries. The traditional style designations of Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite reflect not only geographic origins or usages but also, to a large extent, the chronological development of these forms (see Figure 4.1).

The Doric order, with plain columns and relatively simple cushionlike capitals standing directly on the temple base or platform, was widely employed in early Greek temples such as the several examples at Paestum in southern Italy (see Figure 4.2), and in classical Greek temples such as the Parthenon in

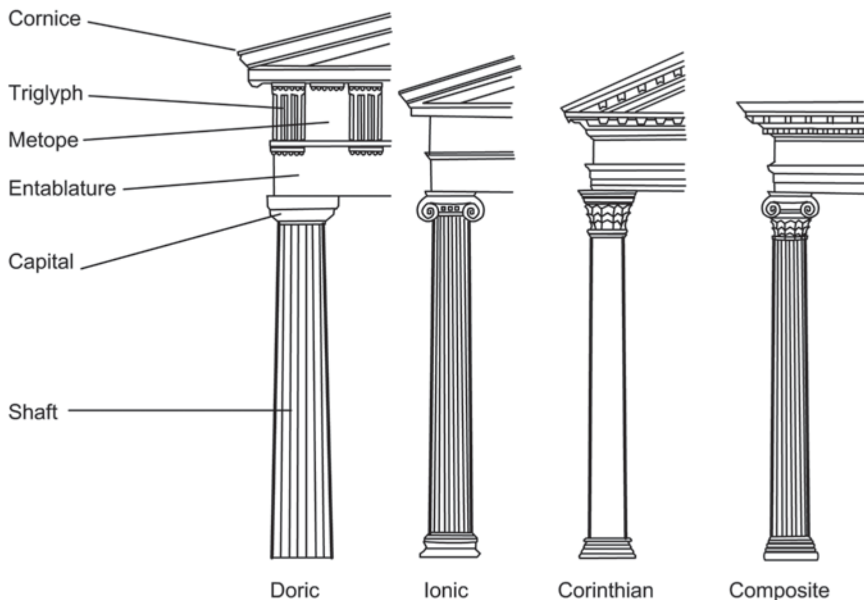


Figure 4.1 Diagram of the Classical Orders. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.



Figure 4.2 Temple of Hera II, Paestum, Italy, ca. 460 BCE. Moemrik / Dreamstime.com.

Athens (see Figure 4.9). The entablature of Doric-style temples is characterized by alternating forms known as *triglyphs* (blocks with vertical bands) and *metopes* (often enriched with small relief sculptures).

The Ionic order is characterized by fluted columns standing on rounded bases and with distinctive scroll-like forms (*volutes*) enriching the capitals. Ionic-style temple entablatures generally consist of continuous sculptural bands (or *friezes*), such as can be seen on the Temple of Athena Nike in Athens from the late fifth century BCE (see Figure 4.3).

The distinctive Corinthian order is recognizable due to its use of foliate capitals—with elegant leafy forms based on the acanthus plant—and tall fluted columns otherwise resembling the Ionic style. Corinthian style capitals are seen on the facade of the Roman Pantheon, ca. 125 CE (see Figure 4.10). The Corinthian and Composite orders (combining Ionic and Corinthian features) were especially employed by the Romans.

Apart from the traditional rectangular (or longitudinal) format, several Greek and Roman temples are also of the circular (or *tholos*) form. The centralized plan was employed both in Greece and Rome primarily for smaller sanctuaries, such as the Roman temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli, ca. 25 BCE (see Figure 4.4). The traditional trabeated (post and lintel) system was augmented significantly by the Roman use of arches as well as concrete construction. Although the true arch form is of some antiquity and disputed origins (corbeled arches were employed in Mycenaean architecture and true arches—based on shaped blocks or *voussoirs*—held in place by a keystone, were employed by the Etruscans)



Figure 4.3 Temple of Athena Nike, Athens, Greece, ca. 427–424 BCE. Scala / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 4.4 Temple of the Sibyl, Tivoli, Italy, early first century BCE. Alinari / Art Resource, NY.

the use of arches on a significant scale is generally credited to the Romans, as well as the use of poured concrete to create impressive structures such as the Pantheon.

The identification of and complex terminology used to describe all the details and decorations of these styles of ancient religious architecture (many of which naturally appear in nonreligious construction too) can be credited largely to the Roman scholar and architect Vitruvius (first century BCE), whose writings were avidly studied in later periods and continue to be so today. Many of the features and forms developed in ancient Greek, Etruscan, and Roman architecture have remained consistently employed or consistently revived in later periods—notably during the 15th- and 16th-century Renaissance period, the 17th-century Baroque, and 18th- and 19th-century neoclassical periods—up to the present day, when even much postmodern architecture references many of the forms and features of ancient classical structures.

Many later architects have made use of the designs and details employed by ancient Greek, Etruscan, and Roman builders for both secular and religious, private and public architecture. The classical architectural vocabulary of forms and designs is still current today. However, the banks, museums, government buildings, libraries, churches, and opera houses that continue to employ this

classical vocabulary differ in some significant ways from the ancient, especially religious, precedents on which they are based.

The temples of ancient Greece and Rome were not primarily designed to be public buildings. Similar to the religious structures of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, Greek and Roman temples did not function as communal gathering places in the same sense that later Christian churches or Jewish synagogues or Islamic mosques do. The interiors of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman temples were more or less off limits to the general populace, akin also to the ancient Jewish temple. The interior enclosures of ancient temples were regularly visited only by a select few—priests and designated officiants who enacted rituals designed to honor and please the deities and who tended and cared for the cult statues within the temples. The designated sacred space of the temple interior was not used for general worship assemblies but was rather intended to serve as a home for the cult statue, the embodiment of sacred power. Many ancient Greek and Roman temples, although architecturally impressive indeed, were not designed to house many worshipers. Nor does it appear that worshipers were often or regularly invited to ever visit temple interiors even individually or in small groups (such as Hindu practice entails). On particular festivals and during specific periods in an individual's life (rituals associated with marriage, for example) worshipers might be invited to enter a temple briefly or view the interior and cult statue from the doorway. However, the general understanding is that public religious rites in ancient Greece and Rome used the temples as focal points for rituals that did not require or provide large interior gathering spaces for congregations, and that altars for rituals were largely located outside the temples.



Figure 4.5 Apollo, detail, from the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, Greece, ca. 480 BCE. Olympia: Archaeological Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Images of Deities

For the most part, the Greeks and Romans visualized and represented the divinities in anthropomorphic form—with human attributes. Numerous freestanding and relief sculptures, often attached to or associated with temples, depict the major deities in various guises and roles. Temple exteriors—especially metopes, friezes, and facade pediments (triangular sections under the sloping roof line of temples)—were frequently

enriched with painted sculptures depicting the classical deities and mythological events in which they played prominent roles. For example, both the eastern and western pediments of the early Classical temple of Zeus at Olympia (ca. 480 BCE) contained numerous images of the deities presiding over, or involved with, significant episodes from ancient mythology, such as the famous figure of Apollo, so often lauded as an exemplar of ideal human beauty in divine form (see Figure 4.5).

Freestanding sculptures, in the form of cult statues, were placed in the interiors of temples. Relief sculptures on temple exteriors and interiors (or on other structures within temple precincts) depict images of deities with symbolic attributes emphasizing their cultic importance and traditions, such as the mid-fifth-century BCE relief of Demeter and Persephone from Eleusis (see Figure 4.6). During the Classical period especially, many deities may be identified by specific body types (youthful, more mature), which reflect the development of naturalism in Greek art as well as specific aspects of the personalities or functions of these deities.[29]

Because of the close association with and placement of these images on the interiors and exteriors of temples, these images of the gods and goddesses may be correctly deemed to be examples of religious art. However, it is crucial to note that images of the deities and scenes from mythology also feature frequently in Greek and Roman art in secular contexts as well. Innumerable examples exist of painted clay vessels especially from ancient Greece (of a great variety of shapes, styles, and secular as well as religious functions) that include images of various divinities and mythological and ritual scenes. The image of the grape-bearing god Dionysus on his ocean voyage provides the central motif for the interior of an often-reproduced Attic *kylix* (wine drinking cup) created by the famous artist Exekias, ca. 540–430 BCE (see Figure 4.7). Dionysus had been captured by pirates but turned the crew into dolphins while the mast of the ship sprouted grape vines.



Figure 4.6 Demeter and Persephone, relief from Eleusis, mid fifth century BCE. Eleusis: Archaeological Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Much visual material for the study of Greek and Roman religion and mythology exists in contexts that are not exclusively religious or directly associated with sacred sites, thus, it is wise to remember that "in ancient Greece . . . religion was totally embedded in society—no sphere of



Figure 4.7 Dionysus kylix by Exekias, ca. 540–530 BCE. Munich: Staatliche Antikensammlung. Foto Marburg / Art Resource, NY.

life lacked a religious aspect."[30] Many public monuments in ancient Rome were also enriched with representations of deities or religious rites that reinforce the significance of community participation and the priestly duties of the emperors, such as the late second-century CE relief of Marcus Aurelius making a sacrifice in Rome (see Figure 4.8).

EXAMPLES

The Parthenon in Athens, Greece (447–438 BCE) and the Pantheon in Rome, Italy (ca. 125 CE)

The Parthenon in Athens and the Pantheon in Rome are, without doubt, the two architectural monuments most often discussed as exemplars of Greek and Roman religious structures (see Figures 4.9, 4.10, and Plate 7). These two structures are consistently included in general surveys of art history, and the specialized scholarship on these two buildings is more than copious.[31] The Parthenon is often seen as the ultimate representative of Greek aesthetics, with its clear and carefully pleasing proportion systems, and the Pantheon is often seen to represent the heights of Roman ingenuity and innovation in construction and engineering techniques. Both well-studied buildings this have "larger-

than-life, iconlike status," and are traditionally regarded as masterpieces of Western civilization.[32] Nevertheless, there are many aspects of their design, construction, and symbolic meanings that continue to provide lively vehicles for scholarly interpretation.



Figure 4.8 Marcus Aurelius making a sacrifice; relief from the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, ca. 176–180 CE. Rome: Palazzo dei Conservatori. Nimatallah / Art Resource, NY.

The Parthenon was constructed during the middle of the fifth century BCE, a time period which is often considered to be a Golden Age in Greece, the height of the Classical period. It was erected on the acropolis—the promontory: *acro* (above) the *polis* (city)—of Athens, under the direction of the Athenian ruler Pericles (490–429 BCE) in 447–438 BCE. It is a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, the patroness and protector of Athens, whose large cult statue—now lost—was originally housed within the building. The Parthenon is often seen to represent a powerful political symbol of Athenian greatness, prestige, and triumph in the recently won Persian War. The Pantheon in Rome is a temple dedicated to the seven major planetary deities of the classical pantheon (hence its name) and was constructed under the direction of the ambitious Roman emperor Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE) during a period of time when the Roman Empire was at a great height of power, prestige, and territorial expansion.

Both of these structures still stand today—the Pantheon in a much better state of preservation than the Parthenon—although both buildings have undergone losses, renovations, and re-usages through the centuries. The Pantheon was converted into a Christian church in the early seventh century CE and was renamed Sancta Maria ad Martyres (or, more popularly, Santa Maria Rotunda). Although sections of the building were slightly altered in subsequent centuries and bronze roof tiles and other elements were removed and reused during the 7th and the 17th centuries, for the most part the building has survived remarkably intact through several periods of repair and restoration. The "building has on the whole been properly and respectfully maintained."[33]

The much older Parthenon, in contrast, has fared far less well and exists today in relatively fragmentary form. Although the majority of columns are still standing (or have been re-erected), much of the original sculptural decoration was removed in the late 18th century under the direction of Lord Elgin (the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1799 to 1803) when the structure had already fallen into a state of disrepair. During the medieval period it had been remodeled for use as a Christian church, was later converted into an Islamic



Figure 4.9 Parthenon, Athens, Greece, 447–438 BCE. Valeria73 / Dreamstime.com.



Figure 4.10 Pantheon, Rome, Italy, exterior, ca. 125 CE. Toddtaulman / Dreamstime.com.

mosque, and in the late 17th century, when a section of the building was being used as a storehouse for ammunition, the central area was blown apart after being hit by a Venetian rocket in their siege of the city (then under Ottoman Turkish control). Many of the sculptures were destroyed then or shortly thereafter removed by the Venetians; the remainder were later removed and shipped to England under the direction of Lord Elgin and are displayed today in the British Museum in London, a fact that continues to provide much controversy.[34]

Both the Parthenon and the Pantheon have inspired numerous later monuments that imitate or reference their overall forms or design elements.[35] The Pantheon has been described as "one of the grand architectural creations of all time: original, utterly bold, many-layered in associations and meaning, the container of a kind of immanent universality. It speaks of an even wider world than that of imperial Rome, and has left its stamp upon architecture more than any other building."[36] The Parthenon, similarly, has been described as "a total form whose parts are perfectly realized."[37]

The Pantheon was built on the site of an earlier rectangular temple that had been constructed in about 25 BCE under the direction of Agrippa (63–12 BCE), the chief minister of Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE). The large inscription on the front of the present building constructed in the second century CE still names Agrippa as the founder of the building. "Considerable confusion has resulted from this inscription," but it appears clear that this represents a restoration of the inscription on the original building.[38] The structure consists of a large entrance porch or portico with 20 Corinthian-style columns (several rows deep) topped by a triangular pediment. From the front, the Pantheon appears to be of traditionally rectangular temple format, akin to many other examples. However, the interior of the structure—which has rarely ever failed to inspire awe—consists of a vast and circular domed space (nearly equal in height and in diameter of 142 feet), which was created by a complex and ingenious system of internally hidden arches supporting and supported by a concrete foundation and framework of progressively lighter load toward the top of the dome.[39] At the apex of the coffered round dome is a 27-foot-wide opening (*oculus*), which admits light to the interior of the building. The sphere of illumination moves daily and seasonally across the niches on the walls below, which, several scholars believe, originally held statues of the deities to whom the temple was dedicated (see Plate 7).

The Pantheon is, for all intents and purposes, a perfectly circular building, while the Parthenon is a perfectly rectangular structure based on a harmonious proportion system of lengths, widths, and heights in related ratios. The Parthenon demonstrates many other subtleties as well: the slight mid-height bulge (*entasis*) of the supporting columns and the slight upward rise of the base and entablature mid-span are not immediately obvious to viewers but contribute greatly to the overall optically grounded and stable effect of the structure.

Although these emblematic structures have provided the materials for massive amounts of scholarship and architectural emulation for many ages, a

number of issues still remain topics of lively debate. While the names of the architects of the Parthenon are known (Iktinos and Kallikrates), as well as the name of the creator and overseer of the Parthenon's sculptural program (Phidias), the names of the architect(s) of the Pantheon are unknown, and, although this is not at all atypical of ancient monuments, the architectural predecessors of this unique building are not entirely clear either. While circular and domed structures had been constructed previously, and the Roman use, if not invention, of poured concrete construction is well demonstrated in numerous other civic and religious structures before the Pantheon, no other building constructed by the ancient Romans truly resembles the Pantheon in size and scale of the undertaking. Indeed, until the middle of the 20th century, the dome of the Pantheon was purportedly the largest concrete span ever built. Although this remarkable structure, "the most grand, innovative, difficult, and complex"[40] monument of ancient Rome, has inspired scholarly study for many eras, the meaning, significance, and symbolism of the building continue to be freshly discussed and interpreted today.[41]

Similarly, a great deal of scholarship has also been devoted to the Parthenon, not only its architectural form but also to the meaning and iconography of its (largely removed) sculptures (metopes, frieze, and pediments), which depict, in the epitome of high Classical style, scenes from mythology and religious celebrations in honor of the goddess Athena. Although the Parthenon and its sculptures have been extremely well studied, new interpretations of the iconography continue to arise as additional documentary, literary, and archaeological evidence comes to light—and as old sources are reconsidered anew by fresh eyes.[42]

Frescoes from the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy, ca. 60–50 BCE

The wall paintings located in two interior rooms of the Villa of the Mysteries near Pompeii have intrigued scholars of ancient art and religion for many years[43] (see Plate 8). Many believe that the full-length figural scenes found in these chambers reflect or illustrate practices associated with the cult of Dionysus (Bacchus), an extremely popular (and often suppressed) mystery cult of the ancient world. Indeed, the villa derives its modern name from these paintings, which were created in the middle of the first century BCE.

The villa itself was constructed in the late third and early second century BCE and underwent a series of renovations and refurbishment under successive owners up until the devastation of Pompeii and environs caused by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. Although the villa was covered over by ash and volcanic material, most of the structure and interior paintings were relatively undamaged when unearthed in 1909. The villa is an excellent example of the type of country residence that was very popular among well-to-do Roman citizens who often owned farmland or engaged in agricultural production. As a wine press was discovered in the excavations, it is assumed that the owners of the villa were

involved with grape cultivation and wine making. Originally a much smaller residence, the villa, by the first century CE, had been enlarged into a complex of close to 30 rooms, with surrounding gardens, porticos, and terraces, plus the enclosed interior courtyards typical of Roman domestic architecture. Interior wall painting in the fresco technique (painting into wet plaster) was also a well developed and popular form of art of ancient Rome that scholars have categorized into distinct styles and phases. The creation of spatial illusion on a large scale via figural scenes, landscape, or painted architectural elements is typical of the first-century style when the famous mystery frescoes were created.

These are located primarily on all four walls of one large room, which has often been identified as a dining or entertainment hall. The paintings depict numerous, primarily female, figures, seated, standing, interacting with each other, and in the presence of male deities (traditionally identified as Silenus and Dionysus—who is shown reclining on the lap of a female figure often identified as his wife, Ariadne, or his mother, Semele). A naked young boy appears to be reading from a scroll; one woman carries a tray; one seated woman appears to be washing her hands (or participating in a libation ceremony); satyrs, goats, and *erotes* (winged cupidlike figures) are present; several females kneel, while others are shown dancing or running; one kneeling woman lifts a cover from a model of an erect phallus stored in a *liknon* (a winnowing tool traditionally used in Dionysian rites); a winged figure wields a rod or whip; and an older woman sits pensively.

However, because "no text has been discovered to give the true key to interpretation [and] no direct antecedents for the Villa pictures have come to light so far," the exact meaning of the scenes remains a matter of some lively scholarly debate.[44] While it seems that the "women participate in a continuous narrative that begins with ritual purification and preparatory offerings and culminates in a dance of initiation," whether this reflects actual Dionysian ceremonies held in the room (as some have believed), initiation rites associated with female sexual maturity and marriage preparations, or whether the paintings symbolize more enigmatic and mystical concepts remain open to interpretation.[45] The subjects "may, in fact, be eclectic to some degree. It is not likely that the painter of this frieze would have revealed the secret details of a particular mystery cult in a domestic room that seems not to have been a closed shrine."[46] On the other hand, less detailed "representations of the Dionysiac cult are among the most popular scenes of private worship" found in ancient Roman art, providing visual evidence which is simultaneously intriguing but also rather frustratingly unclear, serving to point out yet again how very much is really still unknown and remains to be discovered about religious and cultic practices in the ancient world.[47]

NOTES

1. See the many helpful maps in Peter Levi, *Atlas of the Greek World* (New York: Facts on File, 1991).

2. Although Indo-European influence on the development of Greek, and hence Western, culture has been traditionally postulated, other views have reasserted the potentially greater significance of Afroasiatic cultures in the formation of ancient Greek civilization, especially connections with Egypt. See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, vol. 1, 1987 and vol. 2, 1991); Mary Lefkowitz and Guy Rogers, eds., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), and Martin Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

3. Jeremy Tanner, "Nature, Culture and the Body in Classical Greek Religious Art," *World Archaeology* 33, no. 2 (2001), 261.

4. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Ancient Greek Religion," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145, no. 4 (2001), 457.

5. Karl Kerényi, *The Religion of the Greeks and Romans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 21.

6. John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 178–79.

7. Richard Geldard, *The Traveler's Key to Ancient Greece: A Guide to the Sacred Places of Ancient Greece* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 37.

8. Geldard, 41.

9. The 12 Olympian deities of ancient Greece and their Roman counterparts are: Zeus/Jupiter, Hera/Juno, Poseidon/Neptune, Demeter/Ceres, Apollo/Apollo, Artemis/Diana, Ares/Mars, Aphrodite/Venus, Hermes/Mercury, Athena/Minerva, Hephaistos/Vulcan, Hestia/Vesta—or Dionysius/Bacchus.

10. Scheid, 154.

11. Robin Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), especially chapter 9, "Persecution and Martyrdom," 419–92.

12. Geldard, 57.

13. Scheid, 22.

14. Scheid, 57.

15. See the beautifully illustrated volume by Panos Valavanis, *Games and Sanctuaries in Ancient Greece* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2004).

16. Jenifer Neils, ed., *Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens* (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, 1992).

17. Jan Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

18. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 95.

19. Susan Blundell and Margaret Williamson, *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

20. See especially Joan Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

21. Many studies have been devoted to all aspects of the worship of the goddess Vesta and the obligations of her priestesses; see, for example, Mary Beard, "The Sexual Status of the Vestal Virgins," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 12–27.

22. Kerényi, *The Religion of the Greeks and Romans*, 261.

23. Alan Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 91.

24. Jan Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

25. Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

26. Karl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

27. Geldard, 61.

28. Much scholarship has been devoted to the sacred landscape of ancient Greece; see especially Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979) and the several excellent essays in Susan Alcock and Robin Osborne, eds., *Placing the Gods: Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

29. Tanner, 257–76, and Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Reading Greek Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), especially 103–38, "Some Characteristics of the Representation of Gods in Classical Art."

30. Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 2.

31. Innumerable volumes and scholarly articles have been devoted to each building as a whole as well as to specialized and detailed aspects of their construction, history, and meaning. For the Pantheon, an excellent source remains William MacDonald, *The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, and Progeny* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

32. Joan Connelly, "Parthenon and *Parthenoi:* A Mythological Interpretation of the Parthenon Frieze," *American Journal of Archaeology* 100, no. 1 (1996): 55.

33. MacDonald, 19.

34. Theodore Vrettos, *The Elgin Affair: The Abduction of Antiquity's Greatest Treasures and the Passions It Aroused* (New York: Arcade, 1997).

35. Jenifer Neils, ed., *The Parthenon from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Parthenon and Its Impact in Modern Times* (Athens: Melissa, 1996).

36. MacDonald, 11.

37. Richard Brilliant, *Arts of the Ancient Greeks* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 195.

38. MacDonald, 13.

39. See MacDonald, 44–47, for construction details.

40. Christiane Joost-Gaugier, "The Iconography of Sacred Space: A Suggested Reading of the Meaning of the Roman Pantheon," *Artibus et Historiae* 19, no. 38 (1998): 21.

41. Joost-Gaugier, 21–42.

42. Connelly, "Parthenon and *Parthenoi*," and Robin Osborne, "The Viewing and Obscuring of the Parthenon Frieze," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987): 98–105.

43. See, for example, Otto Brendel, *The Visible Idea: Interpretations of Classical Art* (Washington, DC: Decatur House, 1980), especially 90–138, "The Great Frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries"; Linda Fierz-David and Nor Hall, *Dreaming in Red: The Women's Dionysian Initiation Chamber in Pompeii* (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2005); and Elaine Gazda, ed., *The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii: Ancient Ritual, Modern Muse* (Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and the University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2000).

44. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults,* 96.

45. Susan Silberberg-Peirce, "The Muse Restored: Images of Women in Roman Painting," *Woman's Art Journal* 14, no. 2 (1993–94): 30.

46. J. J. Pollitt, "Rome: The Republic and Early Empire," In *The Oxford History of Classical Art,* ed. Richard Boardman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 283.

47. Silberberg-Peirce, 36, n.26.

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—5—

Mesoamerican and Andean Religions

The regions of Central and South America provide the primary focus of this chapter. *Mesoamerica* is a geographic term that refers largely to present-day Mexico, Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, and Guatemala. This chapter also includes discussion of some of the ancient cultures of the South American Andean regions between Ecuador and northern Chile—primarily centered in present-day Peru. For purposes of this study, the focus is on the precolonial period when the art and architectural forms reflected the religious practices of the several successive cultures in these regions largely before contact with western Europeans in the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

The history of ancient Mesoamerica and the Andean regions is traditionally divided up into a series of successive and often overlapping phases associated with the rise and fall of several different but related cultural groups. Evidence of human habitation in these regions dates back to the prehistoric Stone Age. Although it remains unclear when and how humans first arrived in or migrated to these regions, it is generally thought that "the inhabitants of Mesoamerica arrived by crossing the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska near the end of the Ice Age."[1] Archaeological evidence appears to demonstrate that Stone Age people were present in the regions from as early as ca. 30,000–10,000 BCE. Agricultural practices developed around 8000–2000 BCE, and it is from this early period that some of the very first cultural groups have been named and identified.

In ancient Mesoamerica, the Pre-Classic period (ca. 2000 BCE–250 CE) is primarily associated with the Olmec civilization (often called the mother culture of ancient Mesoamerica), centered in central Mexico and the lowlands of the southern Gulf Coast. The Classic period (ca. 250–900 CE) is largely associated with the Teotihuacán culture (based on the great metropolis of Teotihuacán near present-day Mexico City), the Maya culture (and significant sites such as Copán, Tikal, and Bonampak), and the Zapotec culture of Monte Albán.[2] The Mayan civilization of Chichén Itzá came to prominence in the Post-Classic period (ca. 900–1521 CE). During this period as well, the Toltecs (ca. 900–1200 CE), with their major center at Tula, and the Aztecs (from the late 12th century), whose capital of Tenochtitlán lies under present-day Mexico City, were extremely important cultural groups.

In the Andean regions, yet other groups have been identified—from the very early Chavín culture (ca. 3000–800 BCE), the Paracas (400–200 BCE), the Nazca (200 BCE–600 CE), the Moche (1–700 CE), the Tiwanaku (100–1000 CE), the Wari (500–800 CE), and, ultimately, the Inca civilization (ca. 1000–1540 CE) with remarkable sites such as Machu Picchu.[3]

The Maya and Aztecs of Mesoamerica and the Incas of South America were, primarily, the last civilizations to have flourished in these regions before the early 16th century, when European explorers, settlers, and Christian missionaries arrived. The dramatic, and ultimately very destructive, consequences of European colonizing interests in these regions simply cannot be underestimated. The initial and subsequent decades of contact between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica and South America were characterized by aggressive warfare, active resistance, huge losses of lives (due not only to war but also to diseases brought by Europeans), and a great loss of cultural material. Many works of art and ancient cultural heritage were destroyed by the European conquerors, and this fact remains a signal tragedy. The historical context of European colonizing efforts in the 16th and subsequent centuries, the ensuing cultural clashes and conflicts, and the perceptions of indigenous cultures demonstrated by these cultural conflicts are all extremely important factors to consider in any study of Mesoamerican and South American art and religion.

An analysis of the different manners in which history is constructed, and how lost cultures are reconstructed, is also extremely relevant for the materials under consideration in this chapter. Western Europeans only became aware of the peoples residing in Central and South America in the 16th century. Later and modern scholarship into the 20th century often reflects this by the use of the term pre-Columbian for studies of Mesoamerican and Andean cultures. The several voyages of the explorer Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) from Spain to the New World are not without relevance here, but the term *pre-Columbian* has tended to be replaced in current scholarship by other designations such as *precolonial,* or simply *Mesoamerican* and *Andean.*

Although traditionally scholarly work on the history, art, and archaeology of Mesoamerica and the Andean regions continues to be undertaken by both non-

native as well as native experts and researchers now, these evolving studies have also been supplemented by a great deal of more popular literature focusing on the mysterious aspects of these ancient civilizations. The earthworks/drawings in the landscape of Peru (well visible from an aerial perspective), attributed to the Nazca culture, have gripped popular imagination a great deal in recent years as potentially representing communications with extraterrestrials. The countdown to the end of time (or at least, this current era)—based on the apparent preoccupation of several Mesoamerican cultures with keeping time and recording dates—has also spawned a great deal of popular as well as scholarly literature.[4] And, because the cultures and belief systems of Mesoamerican and Andean peoples still survive today in new transformations, any discussion needs to take these complex factors into account as well.[5]

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

The successive and often overlapping cultures in Mesoamerica and the Andean regions all developed distinctive religious beliefs and imagery; however, some fundamental shared characteristics can also be seen. One pervasive theme is the belief that the existence of the world and universe is characterized by a series of cosmogonic eras or ages, all terminating in catastrophic destruction before the commencement of new eras. The number of eras varies somewhat in different cultural traditions; however, the idea that measurable periods of time commence and conclude with cataclysmic events is a concept shared across many Mesoamerican, as well as other world, cultures. The remarkable, complex, and highly sophisticated calendar systems developed by the Maya and Aztec cultures, for example, more than demonstrate the importance of timekeeping within the larger cosmic scheme.

"In Mesoamerican thought, the calendar concerned the definition and ordering of space as well as time."[6] Spatial directions, cosmic cycles, and natural forces were also associated with an extensive range of deities. Similar types of deities were developed by different Mesoamerican and Andean cultures as well as rich traditions of mythology and iconography for depicting the numerous deities.[7] Many deities were visualized in anthropomorphic form—with fundamentally human features—but may also exhibit distinctive markings or nonhuman, animal features as well. Jaguars, serpents and snakes, birds, and monsters of several configurations appear in various combinations and forms. Many deities appear as zoomorphs, combining features of several different animals, and some deities appear in several different guises that emphasize their different aspects and attributes. For example, in Maya imagery

> The sun can appear as a young male, an aged male, an anthromorph with jaguar features or a half-skeletal zoomorph with a sun bowl on its forehead. These contrasting and superficially unrelated forms appear to express different aspects of the same entity—in this case, the newly risen sun, the sun near sunset, the sun in the Underworld and the sun as cosmic object.[8]

The deities often have similar or shared attributes as well, so several scholars believe it is likely that they were seen less as a series of individual and distinct entities but rather as aspects "of a more generalized force, or array of powers and qualities, with a subset relevant to any particular occasion or ceremony . . . as personified representations of the commonest combinations of supernatural elements."[9] On the other hand, scholars have identified a number of principal and distinct deities distinguished by their associations with the sun and the moon, various stars and constellations, the earth, water, rain, and lightening, warfare, death, and bloodletting, knowledge, creation, magic, and sorcery, agriculture, and critical crops such as maize or corn. Maize deities are often represented in the arts of many Mesoamerican and Andean cultures (see Figure 5.1). There were also patron deities of specific occupations and particular cities. Prominent among the many different deities is the well-studied Feathered-Serpent God (Quetzalcoatl or Kukulcan), who was widely venerated by various Mesoamerican cultures in different forms, and was frequently represented in art[10] (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3).

The role and function of the deities and the role of humans in relationship to the deities were intimately connected. The deities were associated with earthly events as well as cosmic eras. They played major roles in the succession of time sequences and were believed to require and reward actions on the part of humans, especially sacrificial blood offerings. Many Mesoamerican cultures employed various methods of human sacrifice and ritual bloodletting as means to honor and appease the deities and to signal the cycles of death and rebirth with which the deities were intimately connected. For the Maya, "it is clear that bloodletting was basic to the institution of rulership, to the mythology of world order, and to public rituals of all sorts."[11]



Figure 5.1 Ceramic vessel with anthropomorphic Maize deities, Moche culture, Peru, 1–700 CE. London: British Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

Many works of art depict ritual bloodletting ceremonies, such as the well-studied relief carvings from the Late Classic Maya site of Yaxchilán in Mexico, ca. 725 CE (see Plate 9). Several carved limestone panels illustrate members of the royal family performing these rites. In the example illustrated, Lady Xoc, the principal wife of the ruler Shield Jaguar II, is shown pulling a rope studded with obsidian shards through her perforated tongue. Her lips and cheeks are covered with scroll-patterns symbolizing



Figure 5.2 The Feathered Serpent God, detail from the Temple of the Feathered Serpent, ca. 200 CE, Teotihaucán, Mexico. Ggordon / Dreamstime.com.

her sacrificial blood. The blood-smeared rope collects on pieces of paper in a ritual basket placed next to her kneeling and elaborately garbed figure. Shield Jaguar II, holding a flaming torch, stands on the left side of the composition, clothed in garments and headdress that also indicate his participation in the sacrificial ceremonies. Rituals such as these indicate "the concept of a reciprocal relationship between humans and the gods. The earth and its creatures were created through a sacrificial act of the gods, and human beings, in turn, were required to strengthen and nourish the gods. . . . blood drawn from all parts of the body—especially from the tongue, earlobes, and genitals—was sustenance for the gods."[12]

Ritual bloodletting and human sacrifice were practiced to a greater or lesser degree in many ancient Mesoamerican and Andean cultures, including the Moche and Inca in South America and the Toltec, Maya, and especially Aztec cultures of Mesoamerica. Much attention has been devoted to this aspect of Aztec civilization in particular.[13] These violent practices were certainly among the aspects of these ancient cultures that most appalled the Spanish settlers and Christian missionaries and that have continued to intrigue and challenge modern sensibilities.

Human sacrifice was often, although not always, associated also with the ritual sport of the ballgame, variations of which appear in several Mesoamerica



Figure 5.3 Stone bust of Quetzalcoatl, Aztec, ca. 1325–1521 CE. London: British Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

cultures, over many centuries.[14] The game appears not to have been practiced among Andean and South America cultures. The sport was played with a hard, solid rubber ball, and, although the rules of the game are not clearly known (and doubtless varied over the centuries), the aim appears to have been for the individuals or teams of players to keep the ball in motion without touching it with the hands. Stone rings or markers set into the enclosing walls of ball courts are found primarily in the Post-Classic period. It appears that points could be scored by directing the ball through the ring (an achievement requiring enormous skill) or by contacting the ring with the ball. "Ball courts, consisting of two parallel structures (with either straight or sloping sides) flanking an earthen or paved stone alleyway that is the court, appear at almost every site from Olmec times to the Conquest."[15] Although ballgames could be played purely for sport, their close association with religious rituals and human sacrifice is made more than clear by numerous examples of painting and sculpture depicting the sacrifice of players (presumably the losing players). The ballgame featured prominently in the ancient Maya creation myth known as the *Popol Vuh* (Council Book), which recounts the adventures of the Hero Twins who "confronted the Lords of Death in the ballgame. . . . The ballgame was the metaphor for life and death. . . . The ballcourt . . . was a crevice leading into the Otherworld. When the Maya played their game, they remade Creation again and again."[16] The regenerative power and importance of blood sacrifice is more than amply demonstrated here.

Much evidence exists for the use of psychotropic substances in ancient Mesoamerican and South American religious rituals.[17] Altered states of consciousness, visions, hallucinations, and contacts with the spirit world were achieved through the use of various natural chemical hallucinogens derived from plants and animals. Ecstatic and hallucinatory experiences were often also associated with the fasting and bloodletting rituals performed by priests and the nobility. Contacts with the supernatural and attempts to discern the will of the deities are also represented by various divination rituals performed by both male and female practitioners. "Among the diviners were specialists such as astrologers,

oracles, illusionists, and interpreters of omens. . . . Some types of practitioners survived, albeit covertly, into the postconquest period, and a few continue to be active even to the present day."[18]

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

The arts associated with or reflective of religious beliefs and practices in ancient Mesoamerica and the Andes encompass all media from large-scale architecture to small-scale pottery. The availability of specific materials (such as gold and jade) in particular regions, and the traditions of wall painting or relief carving especially developed by particular cultures may stand out as special features of different groups and time periods. Because religion was such an integral aspect of life in these ancient cultures, the impression that a majority of the art that survives was designed for religious purposes is surely correct.

Pyramid-Temple Complexes

The architectural form most characteristic of ancient Mesoamerican religious centers is the *pyramid-temple complex*, a term used by many scholars to describe the numerous examples of elevated structures in pyramidal form associated with smaller related buildings. Numerous examples of these complexes exist, representing a range of dates and differing cultural styles. The fundamental format consists of a raised pyramid (of earth and stone) serving as an axial focal point for a ceremonial plaza, which is often defined by platforms, other enclosures, walls, or columns. The general layout of the Mesoamerican pyramid-temple complex bears some resemblance to the earlier structures of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt (see chapters 2 and 3) with carefully sited, heavenward-reaching monuments of impressive scale, viewable from some distance.

The earliest example of such a pyramid-temple complex in Mesoamerica is traditionally said to be that of the Olmec site at La Venta, Mexico, dating ca. 1110–400 BCE. The ritual center of the great city of Teotihuacán in Mexico contains two large multiplatformed (or stepped) pyramids made of stone-veneered mounds of earth, probably constructed between the first century BCE and the second century CE (see Figure 5.4). The Pyramid of the Moon is located at the north end of a long causeway, and the larger Pyramid of the Sun is located on the southeastern side of the causeway. The later Mayan site of Tikal in Guatemala contains several exceptionally steep and tall pyramids, largely dating to the seventh and eighth centuries CE (see Figure 5.5). There are excellent examples of pyramid-temples at many other Maya sites such as Palenque, from the 7th century CE , and Chichén Itzá, from the 10th century CE (see Figure 5.6). The pyramid-temple form was employed by the Zapotec, Toltec, and Aztec cultures, as well as several Andean cultures.

Many of the stepped pyramids as well as terraces and other structures in temple complexes make use of *talud* and *tablero* forms—with combinations of



Figure 5.4 Teotihaucán, Mexico, general view. Tompozzo / Dreamstime.com.

horizontal friezes (*tableros*) alternating with sloped planes of masonry (*taluds*). Wall surfaces were often painted and enriched with carved relief sculptures. The temple structures on top of pyramids may have one or more entrances; many temples have elaborate roof combs or *talud*-like elements at their tops.



Figure 5.5 Temple 1 (Temple of the Great Jaguar), late seventh/early eighth century CE, Tikal, Guatemala. Nhtg / Dreamstime.com.

The function of these structures was often multifaceted as were the rituals and ceremonies enacted. Many pyramids served as burial places for prominent rulers and thus functioned to immortalize their deeds and enhance the prestige of their descendants as well. The tomb of the seventh-century Mayan ruler, Lord Pacal, discovered in the early 1950s within the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque is an excellent and well-studied example. Many of the pyramids at other Mesoamerican sites, however, do not seem to have functioned primarily as royal burial sites but rather as locales for the enactment of religious rituals involving sacrificial offerings to the deities and festivals celebrating or commemorating the passage of time and cosmic cycles. In no cases do the interiors of pyramid-temples offer any architectural space for congregational or community gatherings even of a limited number of participants. Like the temples of ancient Greece, these structures primarily served as focal points for religious ceremonies performed outside—rather than inside—the buildings.



Figure 5.6 Temple of the Inscriptions, late seventh century, Palenque, Mexico. Koubatian / Dreamstime.com.

Symbols and Glyphs

Much of the degree of confidence with which current scholars discuss ancient Mesoamerican art and culture is due to the painstaking and remarkable decipherment of the picture-writing systems developed by the Maya culture, especially. Like the breakthrough in decipherment of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, this work has added enormously to the field of study.[19] Most of this work is relatively recent and continues to be avidly pursued today. Although some early archaeologists had assumed that the symbols and signs found carved and painted on ancient monuments represented some form of picture-writing system (rather than simply decorative devices), and several early Spanish settlers and missionaries had earlier taken some interest in recording the glyphs and picture-symbols of the Aztec culture, it was not really until the middle of the 20th century that major advances were made in the understanding of ancient Maya writing.[20] "Though still not fully deciphered, Mayan writing is the best understood of all pre-Columbian Mesoamerican scripts. Its characteristic features, found in monumental reliefs, on wood and painted pottery, and in paper codices, can be thought of as the quintessence of the American tradition."[21]

Previously thought to be primarily based on pictograms and other visual symbols (which largely recorded dates and calendar counts), it is now understood as a highly complex system involving both phonetic signs (which denote words

and syllabic sounds) interspersed with pictograms. Maya glyphs are generally arranged into blocks in horizontal and vertical rows and are read from left to right in pairs and from top to bottom in columns. The "rapid progress in deciphering the glyphs now permits epigraphers, linguists, archaeologists, and art historians to use Maya inscriptions and pictorial records as a primary source of information on the identity of the Maya, their world view and social system. Maya history can now be understood from records describing the events of their lives, written from their own point of view."[22] Although scholars do not assume that a generally high level of literacy existed in ancient Maya society, it is clear that the glyphic (and often repetitious) inscriptions on public monuments were meant to be read and understood in some form by the general populace, whereas the creation and reading of the more complex glyphic sequences was doubtless the purview of the educated elite classes, priests, scribes, and royalty.

Writing systems were developed in several other Mesoamerican cultures (Olmec, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Aztec), some of which have been partially deciphered and several of which appear to have relied much more on pictography than the Maya system did. The repeated signs and symbols, found in various media from several Peruvian cultures, may also represent examples of written communication systems. Although the Inca never developed a writing system, they kept masterful records of economic transactions as well as events in the form of *quipus*, color-coded and knotted fiber cords.[23]

EXAMPLES

Las Limas Monument 1: "The Lord of Las Limas," ca. 800–300 BCE

The Olmec culture flourished in Mesoamerica from approximately the 15th to 1st century BCE and is often called the Mesoamerican mother culture, or America's first civilization.[24] Although "much has been written about Olmec religion in recent years, most of it is speculative and almost none can be proven beyond a reasonable shadow of doubt."[25] The monuments and mysterious imagery of the Olmecs continue to provide a very rich field for scholarship.

A number of Olmec monuments depict enigmatic creatures that combine human and feline features—traditionally termed "were-jaguars"—such as the reclining figure held in the lap of the seated male figure in this example (see Figure 5.7). Popularly known as the "Lord of Las Limas," this carved greenstone statue (approximately 22 inches tall) was discovered accidentally by two children in 1965 in the village of Las Limas, Mexico, once a major Olmec center. "The modern history of the Lord of Las Limas is as fascinating as the sculpture itself."[26] When first discovered, and because of the sculpture's general resemblance to traditional Christian imagery of the Madonna and Child, it was initially venerated by the villagers as the Matron of Las Limas—a miraculous materialization of the Virgin Mary. Eventually it was moved to the anthropological museum in Vera-

cruz, from which it was stolen a few years later. Ultimately, the sculpture was rediscovered (in a motel room in San Antonio, Texas) and returned to the museum.

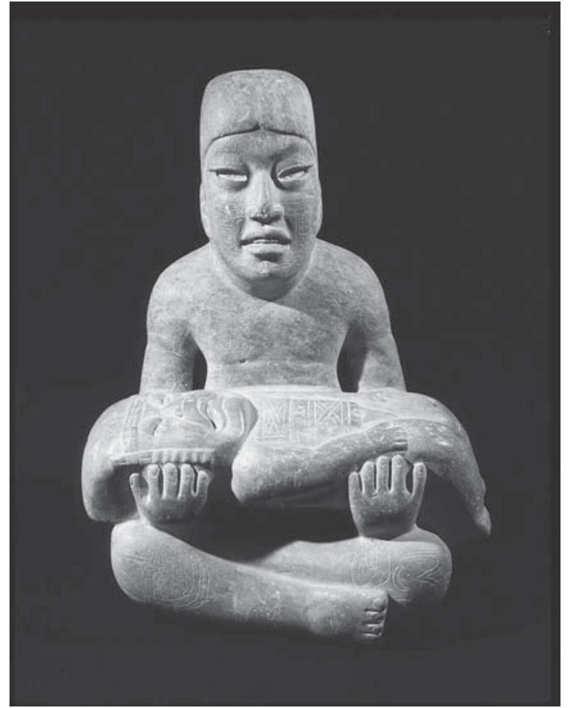


Figure 5.7 Las Limas Monument 1: "The Lord of Las Limas," Olmec, ca. 800–300 BCE. The Art Archive / Xalapa Museum Veracruz Mexico / Gianni Dagli Orti.

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to this object, to the prominent imagery of were-jaguars in Olmec art, as well as to feline motifs generally in Mesoamerican art.[27] Were-jaguars typically show the down-turned mouth and almond-shaped eyes characteristic of Olmec figural representation in general plus varying degrees of feline features, such as a flattened wrinkled nose, protruding fangs, a cleft forehead, and flamelike forms rising from the eyebrows. The were-jaguar, however, "as a typological unit is at best a convenient rather than a precise classification," because it is clear that the specifically feline characteristics do not appear to the same degree in all examples identified as were-jaguars.[28] Such is the case with the Las Limas monument, where the were-jaguar baby held in the lap of the seated figure shows notably few feline features. Several scholars of Mesoamerican mythology have stated that the Olmec believed their ancestors came from a union of humans and the powerful jungle predator, the jaguar. Depictions of human-jaguar copulation scenes have been identified (and disputed) in Olmec art.[29] Other scholars have suggested that the figural and facial deformities shown by the were-jaguars in Olmec art actually represent congenital defects in children born to some early members of the ruling classes, and that the association with jaguars was the result of rulers' concerns with validating their political power. It would be a "definite advantage to identify the child's deformities with the characteristics of the supernatural jaguar and to offer the births to the populace as evidence that jaguar blood ran in the family, producing were-jaguar offspring."[30] Other scholars have described the figure traditionally shown holding the were-jaguar babies as a shaman "or priest, in an attitude of offering, presenting an inanimate being that confers upon him supernatural powers."[31]

> Shamans, the actual religious practicers, were men and women whose special powers allowed them to establish contact with the supernaturals. . . . While in trances, often induced by fasting and psychotropic substances, shamans traveled the cosmos accompanied by their animal familiars as they attempted to heal the

> sick, establish contact with the ancestors, and propitiate forces beyond human control.[32]

The priest/shaman/official of the Las Limas sculpture has incised tattoolike designs on his face, shoulders, and legs, the identification of which has also intrigued scholars. These images have been identified as specific Olmec deities, forerunners of later widely venerated Mesoamerican deities: the god of spring, the fire serpent, the plumed serpent, and the god of death. In this case, the were-jaguar would be associated with the water deity, thus forming an "Olmec Pentateuch, with each figure displaying the oldest known representations of later Mesoamerican supernaturals."[33] It is clear that this work of art, as well as many other remarkable Olmec works, will continue to provide material for much further study.

Drawing of the Lid of the Sarcophagus of Lord Pacal of Palenque, ca. 684 CE

This intriguing and celebrated monument was discovered in the mid-20th century during excavations at the Mayan site of Palenque in Mexico. It provides an excellent introduction to the many complexities of Mesoamerican religious iconography, beliefs about death and the afterlife, and the important position of royal rulers in the earthly and cosmic scheme. The relief carved limestone cover of Lord Pacal's sarcophagus illustrates his death and descent into the underworld. It is replete with complex symbolism and is reproduced here as a line drawing for greater legibility (see Figure 5.8).



Figure 5.8 Drawing: Lid of the Sarcophagus of Lord Pacal from Palenque, ca. 684 CE. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.

Pacal (or Hanab Pakal, 603–684 CE) ruled for 68 years (ascending to the throne at the age of 12) and is credited with many accomplishments. "The most revered king in Palenque's history and one of the best-known Maya kings to the modern world," during his reign Palenque became an especially important, wealthy, and powerful Maya center and was enriched with numerous monuments including the Temple of the Inscriptions within which his tomb was located.[34] The tomb and the multitiered stepped pyramid-temple were constructed contemporaneously. Pacal was interred in a massive sarcophagus placed in a burial chamber within the heart of the pyramid. After his entombment, the vaulted stairway leading from the temple down to the burial chamber was filled in with earth and stones. This hidden staircase was uncovered

in the early 1950s by archaeologists who were thrilled and astonished to find the burial chamber, ritual offerings, grave goods, and the elaborately carved sarcophagus of Lord Pacal intact and undisturbed after so many centuries.

The huge stone lid of the sarcophagus measures over 12 by 7 feet, and the complex imagery carved on its surface has been much studied and interpreted. The central figure is Lord Pacal himself, poised, in a half-seated, half-reclining position, at the moment of his death. He appears to be falling backward onto the shape of a monstrous creature, which scholars have identified as the Quadripartite Sun Monster, representing sunset—or the death of the sun. "The sun, poised at the horizon, is ready for the plunge into the Underworld. It will carry the dead king with it."[35] The shapes and patterns at the very bottom of the scene have been identified as the Mouth of the Underworld, consisting of two skeletal dragons forming a U-shape into which Pacal and the Sun Monster will plummet. Rising up from the underworld and partially overlapped by Pacal's body is a shape traditionally identified as the World Tree. A double-headed serpent bar and other branches with square-nosed dragons are found partway up the World Tree, while a Celestial Bird perches atop the tree. Numerous other symbols in the densely packed composition have been identified as references to blood and the bloodletting rituals traditionally performed by the Maya rulers to please and honor the deities. The upward sprouting World Tree and the backward fall of Pacal into the jaws of the Underworld provide a sense of both ascending and descending movement in the composition. Although the sun sets on the horizon at nightfall, it rises again at daybreak. The symbolism thus involves not only death but also rebirth.

> In his eighties at the time of his death, Hanab Pakal may have indeed seemed immortal to his subjects, and the complex burial program he probably helped design conspired to promote the notion. On the surface of the sarcophagus . . . Hanab Pakal dressed as the Maize God. . . . falls into the open maws of death. . . . From his body arises the World Tree, the central axis of the earth that every king was responsible for sustaining in position. On the sides of the sarcophagus, ancestors sprout from the earth that has cracked to let them grow, vivid evidence that Hanab Pakal's death has brought renewal for the entire earth.[36]

Although "Pakal falls in death . . . his very position also signaled birth—his birth into the Otherworld and his eventual rebirth as the Maize God and revered ancestor."[37]

The Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, 15th Century CE

Written and illustrated books were produced in great numbers in preconquest Mesoamerica. However, the majority of these materials were destroyed by European conquerors and missionaries eager to eradicate native traditions and pagan religious practices. Although some copies of old books were made in the postconquest period under the direction of Europeans interested in the history

and customs of the conquered Mesoamerican peoples, there are only slightly more than a dozen books of preconquest date that survive today "because the conquerors sent them to Europe as curiosities or because they were secretly kept in native hands as heirlooms."[38]

The Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, housed today in the World Museum in Liverpool, England, is one of the very few surviving preconquest books (see Plate 10). The early history of the manuscript is not known—how and when it arrived in Europe is unclear; it is named after the English collector (Mayer) who purchased the book from its Hungarian owner (Fejérváry) in the 19th century. It is made of deerskin parchment folded accordion or screen-fold style (typical of the format of several other preconquest books) and is painted on both sides of each of the slightly over 20 pages. It is traditionally described as a product of the later Mixtec culture of central Mexico and bears some significant resemblances to several other religious manuscripts known as the Borgia group (named after an especially significant example in the Vatican Library in Rome).

The Codex Fejérváry-Mayer is an excellent example of a *tonalamatl* (an Aztec book of days), a type of divinatory and ritual calendar used by Aztec priests to foretell events in given periods of time.

> The *tonalamatl* was a specialist's tool, consulted by a priest called a *tonalpouhqui* who was esteemed as a wise man and owner of books. This "reader of day signs" was skilled in interpreting its various sets of images, the fates they embodied, and the resulting augural combinations. Weighing these factors, he determined whether a day was auspicious or not for a given action. A day might be judged lucky, unlucky, or a bit of both.[39]

The painted pages are enriched with colorful images of various deities, signs for different days and directions, representations of sacred trees, birds, and other symbolic devices indicating forces believed to influence different days and time periods. Traditionally arranged into a 260-day (yearly cycle) of 20 periods of 13 days (each period under the auspices of a particular deity), the calendar "expressed a specifically religious structuring of time. . . . The *tonalamatl* thus served as a guide for synchronizing the activities of an individual with what was believed to be the will of the gods."[40] Scholars have identified several of the deities depicted in this codex as merchant gods, whose influence would have been especially important for those involved with long-distance trading journeys and other forms of commerce. The influence of the deities on earthly endeavors, the interconnectedness of the sacred and worldly realms, and the critical importance of timekeeping in the Mesoamerican world are factors well demonstrated in this example as well as in the next.[41]

The Aztec Calendar Stone, Early 16th Century

"No single image of ancient Mesoamerica is better known than the Great Calendar Stone: it is reproduced on ashtrays, keychains, liquor labels, and is

popular both in and outside of Mexico."[42] The subject of innumerable studies—both scholarly and popular—it is included here as an example of the ancient Mesoamerican beliefs in the cyclic nature of time and the continuing fascination these beliefs hold in today's world. Housed in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, the calendar stone was discovered in the late 18th century, lying face down in Mexico City's Plaza Mayor, the site of the ancient Aztec city of Tenochtitlán. It is traditionally dated to the reign of Motecuhzoma II (Montezuma), ca. 1502–20, the last ruler of the Aztecs before the dramatic fall of the Aztec empire under the Spanish conquistadors led by Hernando Cortés (1485–1547). The circular basalt stone measures 13½ feet in diameter and exhibits a dense and complex diagram carved in relief, which was originally brightly painted (see Figure 5.9).

Although "the exact orientation and function of the monument have never been ascertained . . . [it] has been used to illustrate Postclassic Mexican cosmological concepts . . . more often than any other single image of the period."[43] Most scholars agree that the object was designed and used in Aztec religious rituals, and "despite its name, the Calendar Stone does not function as any sort of a useful calendar but works rather as a record of calendrical cataclysm."[44]

The complex imagery is arranged, in mandalalike fashion, into a series of concentric rings enclosed on the rim by two snakes, which symbolize the 24-hour daily passage of the sun through day and night. A large solar disk, with pointed projections, forms the core of the carving, while the face of a deity—with gaping mouth—appears at the very center. Scholars have identified the glyphs and symbols ranged in the several rings as referring to specific dates in the Aztec calendar as well as to the four cyclical eras through which the universe had already passed. When the relief was carved, the Aztecs believed the universe had entered into the fifth and final era and that it was only a matter of time before cataclysmic destruction would occur unless proper rituals were regularly undertaken to prevent or at least forestall this.



Figure 5.9 Aztec Calendar Stone, ca. 150–220 CE. Mexico City: National Anthropological Museum. Furzyk73 / Dreamstime.com.

Although early scholars identified the deity at the center of the disk as the Aztec sun god, Tonatiuh, more recent scholarship has identified this fearsome figure as the Lord of the Night, Yohualtecuhtli—with traits and features of the female earth monster, Tlatecuhlti. "The image thus created is of the sun fallen on earth, the cataclysm complete, the Aztec world ended. . . . The Calendar Stone is exhibited and reproduced as a wall panel today, but it was probably set on the ground, with blood offerings anointed on the earth monster to keep the apocalypse at bay."[45]

Within just a few years of the creation of this stone monument, the world as known by the Aztecs did effectively come to an end. Thus, the calendar stone has "come to symbolize for the Mexican people the beauty and complexity of their Pre-Columbian heritage."[46] The image has thus taken on many connotations, primarily reflective of postcolonial social and political concerns up to the present day, when fascinations with Mesoamerican calendar systems have also inspired a great deal of literature concerning the apocalyptic end of time.

Much attention has been devoted to the year 2012, which marks the end of an over 5,000-year cycle in the Maya calendar, according to their long count system. The significance and meaning of this date remain hotly debated and may continue to provide additional topics of investigation (both scholarly and popular) well into the 21st century. Predictions of the end of time and resulting apocalyptic events have traditionally, in many religious systems, engaged and provided a source of concern for humankind. The current wave of popular interest in the calendar systems of ancient Mesoamerica continues to reflect this very well.

Nazca Lines, Peru, ca. 200–600 CE

The Nazca culture flourished in the coastal areas of southern Peru especially between about 100 BCE and 800 CE, although archaeological remains in the region are of much earlier and later dates as well. Among the many arts associated with Nazca culture (such as sculpture, woven textiles, and painted pottery vessels), the lines in the desert have gripped the attention of researchers since they were first rediscovered and began to be studied in the early 20th century (see Figure 5.10). Indeed, "few of the world's most famous artifacts have been more over-dramatized or less well understood" than the Nazca lines, doubtless because "these enormous odd shapes carved on an inhospitable desert remain virtually unique in the world."[47] Many believe that they must have had a religious or ritual function, and—although this is by no means absolutely certain—they serve as an excellent example of the stimulating challenges posed by any study of ancient cultures and belief systems.

The lines are found in an area of close to 200 square miles of the southwestern Peruvian coastal desert and consist of very long straight lines, geometric and curvilinear patterns, and several animal, insect, and humanoid figures. Subjects include several species of birds (hummingbird, condor, and



Figure 5.10 Nazca Lines, ca. 200–600 CE, Peru. Jarnogz / Dreamstime.com.

cormorant), fish, flower, monkey, and spider shapes. Most of the subjects also appear on Nazca painted pottery. The lines were created by removing or scraping away dark (iron-oxide coated or desert-glazed) stones, revealing the lighter and pinkish-colored earth underneath. The dark stones were carefully piled next to the lines, creating black borderlines next to the exposed areas of lighter sand. The date, purpose, and function of the lines remain topics of much scholarly debate and popular speculation. A number of different theories about their meaning have been advanced, ranging from mystico-religious to purely aesthetic. Although the lines were well known to the local populace, their aerial rediscovery by outsiders in the 1930s led many to believe that because the lines seemed to be best viewed from the air, the markings may have been actually meant to be seen from above, for example by the Nazca deities (or even ancient astronauts from outer space, a theory that was especially popular in the 1970s). The early 20th-century aviators who first saw the markings from the air used the term "lines" to describe them—as they may have appeared to look like airplane landing strips from an aerial perspective. It has often been pointed out, however, that the lines are also quite well viewed and experienced from ground level perspective or from the low flanking foothills and high dunes in the area.

Some have claimed that the lines functioned as astronomical markers, pointing to places on the horizon where the sun or particular constellations

of stars rose and set at specific times of year. A great deal of painstaking astro-archaeological work has been undertaken attempting to correlate the directions of the lines and patterns, as well as the avian and animal imagery, to cyclic celestial events. Although adherents of these theories have produced much work demonstrating their convictions, not all agree that these theories are accurate. Some have seen the lines as expressions of highly esoteric and advanced geometric knowledge on the part of the ancient Nazca people; others have described the lines as requiring remarkable feats of precise engineering and mapping abilities; yet others have described the lines as examples of early earthwork art forms.

Several scholars most recently have hypothesized that the lines functioned in ancient religious ceremonies related to agriculture and irrigation, a constant and logical concern of inhabitants in these arid regions. Perhaps the lines (or in this case more correctly paths) served as ritual sites on which walking or dancing ceremonies were held to induce rain from the gods, or, to indicate the above- and below-ground courses or channels where water seasonally collects and from which it directionally flows. Some support for these theories is also provided by ethnographic studies of the contemporary practices of native peoples in the regions, where pilgrimages and walking ceremonies along set paths occur seasonally and are linked with the rainfall and drought cycles of the agricultural year.

Although the vast majority of the paths are straight lines that often intersect, or that show various geometric configurations, the bird, animal, and humanoid figures are certainly among the most well-known and popularly reproduced. These particular designs are mostly concentrated in one area of the vast network, and many efforts have been made to explain their meaning and purpose in conjunction with the various theories advanced about the overall line system. For example, the large condor, shown in the figure, has been said to symbolize the advent and cessation of rain in the desert region. The condor was also associated with the mountains—if not also seen as a manifestation of a mountain or rain deity.[48] "Modern Nazca farmers interpret sightings of herons, pelicans or condors as signals of rain, while the mountain spirits usually take the shape of birds in order to 'speak' to priests and sorcerers."[49] The lines and designs may thus indicate messages to the deities and may have been intended to invoke and ensure the necessary seasonal rains.

Whenever evidence exists of human endeavors on such a grand scale as the Nazca lines demonstrate, it is often assumed that religious motivations will offer an explanation—or at least a partial explanation. This may seem a reasonable assumption, but the fact remains that the exact purpose and function of the Nazca lines is yet unclear, and additional theories will doubtless continue to be proposed as further research is undertaken in this exciting and field. "The variety of markings . . . challenges our imagination, and means there will always be room for alternative theories. It seems unlikely that the mystery will ever be fully exhausted, and it would surely be a pity if it was."[50]

NOTES

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9. John Henderson, *The World of the Ancient Maya* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 52. See also Joyce Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion: A Comparison of the Zapotec and Maya," *World Archaeology* 10, no. 2 (1978): 172–91.
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—6—

Native American Religions

The focus of this chapter is on the indigenous religions of North America—including the continental United States, Alaska, and Canada. Information regarding the indigenous religions of South and Central America can be found in chapter 5, "Mesoamerica and Andean Religions," and discussion of native Hawaiian religious practices can be found in chapter 7, "Indigenous Religions of Oceania."

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

When Europeans first reached North America in significant numbers in the 16th and 17th centuries, they encountered numerous groups of people already resident in the land. The Italian-born explorer Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) is often credited with the discovery of America in the late 15th century, as well as the use of the term "Indians" to describe the inhabitants he encountered when he landed on the island of San Salvador in the Bahamas in 1492. Columbus was searching for a sea route from Europe to the East Indies in order to advance trade in goods and spices from that region of the world, and believed that he had achieved this goal. The term "Indian" reflects this, as "it was entirely logical for him to call the lands he claimed for Spain 'the Indies,' and its people *Indios*."[1] However, within a few years after this, because of the additional explorations of figures such as Vasco Nuñez de Balboa (1475–1519) who traveled across Central America to reach the Pacific Ocean in the early 16th century, it became clear that the land was not actually India at all, but rather a whole new region of the world. Nevertheless, the term "Indian" has often continued

to be applied to the native peoples of North America up to the present day. The acceptance of this term has varied, however, as it ultimately reflects European usage and misconceptions. Many scholars now prefer to use the term "Native American" as a general descriptor for the great variety of cultural groups represented by the original inhabitants of these world regions, although acceptance of this term has varied widely as well.[2] It is wise to note that any terms (such as "Native American," "Indian," "Native American Indian," or "indigenous peoples") represent attempts to characterize a great diversity of cultures under a single overarching designation—and as such will always be problematic.

Equally, if not even more, problematic are the various theories that have been advanced regarding the dates and origins of human habitation in North America. A majority of scholars, however, believe that many of the original inhabitants of North America arrived from Asia sometime between 20,000 and 10,000 BCE via crossing the now submerged land bridge of Beringia (between Siberia and North America) as well as by boat.[3] These early Paleolithic peoples were hunter-gatherers and eventually spread widely through the regions of North and South America, developing a variety of modes of existence via adaptation to diverse geographic areas and changing climate conditions. Through subsequent millennia, and additional migrations, the patterns of life developed by these ancient ancestral people ultimately resulted in the enormous variety of lifestyles represented among native groups at the time of first contact with Europeans. "By the time Europeans came, millions of Native Americans occupied every conceivable form of landscape, from tropical rainforest to high desert, from grassland plain to boreal forest."[4] Some peoples maintained nomadic lifestyles based on hunting; others developed agricultural farming and aquacultural cultivation methods; in some regions people lived in small family or related groups; in other regions substantial groups of people lived in permanently settled communities characterized by large-scale architectural construction.

The extreme variations in geography and climate within the vast areas occupied by the original inhabitants of North America cannot be overemphasized. Ranging from the Arctic coasts of Alaska and Canada to the hot, dry climate of the Southwest, from the Woodlands areas of the east, to the Great Plains of central Canada and the United States, the native inhabitants of these regions all developed distinctive cultures and traditions. Most studies of Native American peoples thus tend to approach this diversity by adopting a regional method—in other words, identifying large cultural areas into which many different peoples may be grouped and situated: the east, west, north, southeast, and northwest, for example. Or, regions may be defined as: the Arctic (northern coasts of Alaska and Canada plus sections of Siberia and Greenland); the Subarctic (northern Canada); the Northwest Coast (southern coast of Alaska plus western regions of Canada to Washington and Oregon); the Plateau (sections of the northwest United States and southwest Canada); the Great Basin (largely parts of Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and California); California;

the Southwest (sections of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Texas, and Nevada); the Plains (central United States and Canada); and the Woodlands (eastern Canada and the United States from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River). Although this traditional regional approach is useful, the creation of any large, generalized categories runs the risk of treating a wide range of cultures as if they were homogenous. It is estimated that when Europeans arrived in North America, there were close to a thousand different groups of native peoples, speaking several hundred different languages. Although it is wise to be attentive to the regional similarities, it is critical to acknowledge their unique identities and traditions as well.

The disastrous consequences of European colonization and contact with Native American peoples are well known. European settlers brought previously unknown epidemic diseases, resulting in dramatic population declines among Native Americans. The territorial expansion policies of many settlers ultimately led to the removal of many indigenous peoples from their homelands and their resettlement on reservations. Although many Native American groups profited initially from contact with Europeans, by engaging in trade and via their introduction to European commodities such as iron tools, firearms, and horses, and many Native American groups adopted aspects of European life and religion, by and large the coming of the Europeans was a violent and calamitous event in the history of native peoples, with far-reaching consequences to the present day.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

It is clear that a great many different—as well as related—cultural groups need to be included in any discussion of Native American religion. The religious beliefs and practices of these diverse groups are all unique in many important ways and also reflect the vastly divergent climatic and geographical characteristics of their regions—from the dry and arid climates of the Southwest, the forested areas of the Atlantic Woodlands and Pacific Northwest, the Great Plains regions of central North America, to the cold, rainy, and frozen climates of the Subarctic and Arctic regions.

Nevertheless, it is the response to climate and geography that is one of the overall shared features of Native American religion. Regardless of the vastly varied geography and climates in which native peoples developed their religious beliefs, a sense of closeness to the land and a connection with nature and natural forces may be seen as a shared characteristic of Native American beliefs. Indeed, it might be said that this shared impulse—a sense of reverence for the natural environment—provides the unifying feature among the diverse traditions developed by indigenous peoples in North America. Terms such as "polytheism," "animism," or "nature worship" are really rather awkward designations (or scholarly constructs) that attempt to describe religious belief systems that do not seem to follow or adhere to the Western monotheistic traditions largely represented by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Monotheistic

belief systems tend to be those that attribute the creation of the universe to a sole divine being, an original generating force, whose guidance was, or is continually, revealed to humans through direct communication or via intermediaries such as prophets or seers. The term "polytheism" is generally used for belief systems in which a variety of different deities are acknowledged and worshiped. Many Native American religious traditions attribute the creation of the universe to an initiating vital force (such as the Great Mother or the Great Father—or their union—or to other spirit beings, such as the Raven) while at the same time paying respect to the various manifestations of this divine force in diverse spirit deities, entities, or powers that may have special influence on certain aspects of human, animal, and vegetable life forms.[5] Efforts to propitiate, celebrate, thank, and acknowledge these forces are a shared motif among the many belief systems of the Native Americans, which also have a greatly popular appeal in today's environmentally sensitive world.

> The importance of land in traditional Amerindian beliefs is rooted in its inherent potential to inscribe an earth-centered hierophany that is itself part of a unitary cosmos. Although there are many themes in traditional Amerindian myth, one attitude appears pervasive: any part of the world may unfold the whole—upperworld, lowerworld, and the ground we stand upon. Any part of the world may unfold the whole more or less according to the strength of individual vision and the cogency of the tribal metaphorical tradition for interpreting that vision.[6]

Works of art produced by Native American peoples demonstrate this sense of connection to the sacred landscape in a diversity of ways—from the materials used to the symbolism involved. Ancient effigy earthworks, such as the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio, represent living creatures of profound symbolic significance in Native American belief systems. The complex designs of the ephemeral Navajo sand paintings are designed to call on the powers of spirit beings to assist in healing ceremonies, serving as temporary sites to connect to powerful and all-pervasive forces. The annual appearance of the masked kachinas among the Hopi and other peoples of the Southwest represents the acknowledgment of humankind's fundamental reliance on the favor of natural forces in order to survive. The spirit beings and clan symbols carved on wooden objects created by many Northwest Coast native groups represent related concerns—of propitiating natural forces and seeking alignment with these forces. In all Native American traditions, the importance of creating and ensuring a harmonious balance between humans and the natural world—a world in which humans and their endeavors are simply one facet—is paramount. It often said that

> to Native Americans, religion, art, and daily life are all the same thing. In fact, art is not a strictly accurate term. Many Indian languages lack a distinct word for art, since there is no distinction between art and life. Art is life. The two are inseparable. A life lived in balance is a work of art, and any object made by a balanced person is an object of art. Or to put it another way, an artfully crafted object reflects the true path of life being walked by its maker.[7]

Communication with the spirit world via intermediaries known as shamans is also a shared aspect of many Native American belief systems and practices. Shamans are special individuals who, via dreams, trance states, visions, or inherent sensitivity, may contact the dead, communicate with the spirits, and receive supernatural instructions by interpreting dreams, omens, and via various forms of divination. Shamans may perform healing, foretell the future, and influence events. Their roles and powers are conceived somewhat differently among various peoples; in some societies both men and women may be called or train extensively to be shamans; in other groups, shamans may be exclusively men or women. The English word *shaman* is generally not used by native peoples, who all have their own language terms for these gifted, revered, and often feared individuals. Many works of art are associated with shamanic practices—ranging from masks, drums, rattles, amulets, and special garments. Shamanism is not unique to North American native peoples, by any means, but has many manifestations in wide-ranging world cultures from prehistory to the present day.[8]

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

The traditional art and architectural forms developed by Native Americans and those forms specifically associated with their religious beliefs and practices are as diverse as the landscapes inhabited by these different cultural groups. The forms and materials used in art production vary greatly depending on the natural or imported resources available. The use of adobe or mud bricks for architectural construction is characteristic of the indigenous peoples of the Southwest for example, whereas the use of wood for creating architectural enclosures and sculptural monuments is, logically, most characteristic of peoples for whom these resources were more available. The nomadic lifestyle of many of the cultural groups in the central or Plains region of North America resulted in the creation of portable religious objects as well as practices emphasizing the creation and veneration of sacred space in appropriately changing locales.

Architectural structures designed for sacred purposes take on a variety of forms. For example, the spectacular cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde, Colorado (notably the Cliff Palace), constructed by the Anasazi people in the mid-13th century, include numerous kivas—sacred enclosures typical of many ancient as well as contemporary Pueblo people[9] (see Figure 6.1). Kivas may be round or rectangular, built of stone or adobe, often have wooden roofs, and are traditionally entered via ladder through the roof. They customarily include a central cavity or floor shrine known as a *sipapu*, which is understood to symbolize the place from which humans originally emerged from Mother Earth. Of varying sizes, some kivas include benches, wall paintings, and hearths. They represent "the oldest type of religious building in continuous use in the Western hemisphere," and are used for social-ceremonial meetings, dances, and for a variety of sacred and secret rituals.[10]



Figure 6.1 Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde, Colorado, ca. 1250. Kropewnicki / Dreamstime.com.

Other Native American people created structures specifically for religious ceremonies, such as the wooden big houses used by the Delaware peoples for annual harvest and New Year rituals, the rain houses used for agricultural rites in the Southwest, and the Plains Indians sun dance lodges. Other structures, such as sweat lodges, were used for ritual purification.

Many structures, such as the impressive wooden longhouses characteristic of the Northwest Coast, served both domestic and religious purposes, being "ritually transformed from secular to sacred structures for . . . ceremonies"[11] (see Figure 6.2). Indeed, Native American domestic dwellings often symbolize key religious beliefs. The Haida longhouse, for example, was understood to stand at the center of the universe, representing the intersection of the three zones: sky, earth, and underworld. A central pole extending through the house was used during religious ceremonies to connect to the spirits and powers of the sky world. The design of Navajo hogans was believed to have been based on instructions originally given by the supernatural being known as Talking God. These wooden structures with earthen floors are carefully oriented with their entrances facing east to the rising sun, and are symbolically divided on the interior into zones symbolizing the other cardinal directions and spheres of sacred influence. While some hogans may be constructed and used only for ritual purposes, it is more often the case that rituals (such as those associated with healing and the creation of sand paintings) are carried out in domestic hogans.



Figure 6.2 Haida Longhouse, Vancouver, Canada. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

> The idea that houses served as models of the universe is suggested by the folklore and architectural terms of native groups as distant from one another as the Eskimo, the Mohave, the Navajo, the Hopi, the Delaware, and the Blackfeet. To the Navajo, mountains were models for the first house, its four principal posts symbolically equated with the four cardinal directions, and its floor space divided into day and night domains. The Hidatsa of North Dakota believed the universe was a massive earthlodge, its sky dome held up by four enormous pillars just like those of their own four-post lodges.[12]

Many different types of objects may be used in religious ceremonies. The creation and offering of prayer sticks is an important tradition among many Pueblo peoples of the Southwest (see Figure 6.3). Prayer sticks or praying sticks (known as *telikinanne* among the Zuni, and *paho* among the Hopi) are carved, peeled, and painted wooden sticks to which bird feathers, shells, and other objects may be attached. The creation of prayer sticks involves important preparations, cleansing, and purification practices. They may be made as offerings to the dead, and used especially in winter and summer solstice ceremonies. After the creation and ritual consecration of prayer sticks, they are planted in fields, springs, river beds, under trees or shrubs, or put in caves, under floors, or on special communal or private altars. The different colors of the prayer sticks

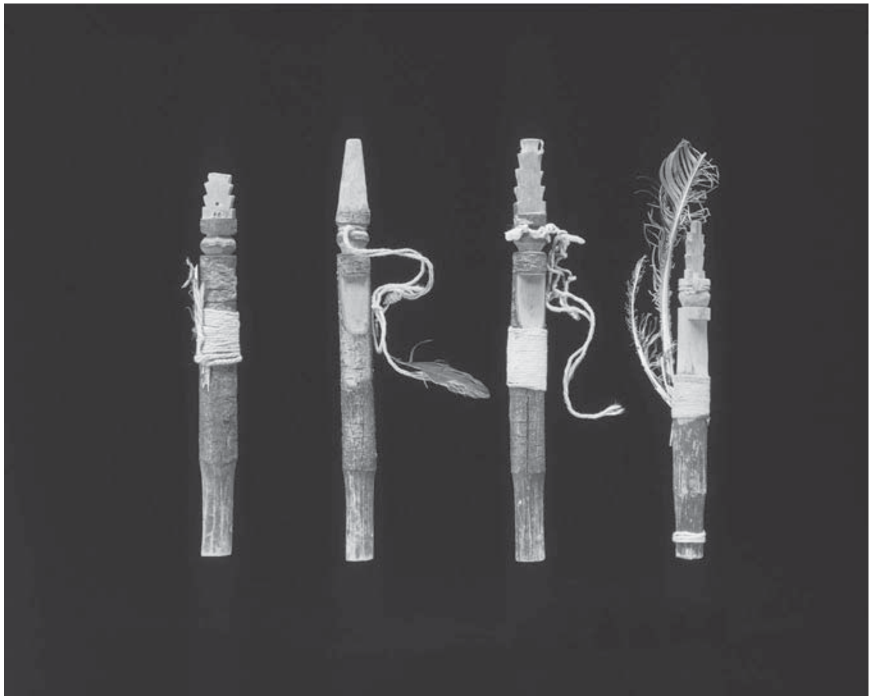


Figure 6.3 Zuni Praying Sticks. Berlin: Ethnologisches Museum. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

and objects attached to them vary greatly according to their purposes and the spirits to whom they are dedicated. Among the Zuni, "men plant their turquoise prayer sticks for the Sun Father . . . and women plant their yellow prayer sticks for the Sun Father's younger sister, the Moonlight-Giving Mother."[13] The feathers (of eagles, ducks, and other birds) are believed to send breath prayers to the spirits. Prayer sticks are extremely significant components in rituals that also involve drumming, dancing, singing, feasting, and masked performances.

Ceremonial costumes, masks, and special garments are traditionally employed in many Native American religious rituals. Dances in which animal masks or costumes may be donned could serve to honor and propitiate animal spirits or ensure their continued availability as a food source for humans. For example, the Okipa or Buffalo Dance of the Plains Mandan people was held annually to pray for plentiful buffalo and other blessings. The bull dancers dressed in identical costumes and masks (see Figure 6.4).

Masks and ritual costumes feature prominently among many native peoples of the Southwest. The ceremonies associated with the return and propitiation of the spirit beings known as kachinas involve use of elaborate headdresses, special costumes, and masks such as the painted, feathered, buffalo hide example illustrated in Figure 6.5. This mask represents the sun, and was probably worn like a shield on the back of a dancer.



Figure 6.4 Mandan Buffalo Head Mask, ca. 1860. The Art Archive / Chandler-Pohrt Collection, Gift of Mr. William D Weiss / Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming / NA.203.359.



Figure 6.5 Hopi Kachina Mask. Private collection. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

The materials used and symbolism involved varies widely from region to region. The masks produced by native peoples of the Northwest are generally carved of wood (especially cedar) and are often boldly painted with curvilinear designs. Many represent mythological creatures, such as the monster bird known as the Crooked-Beak-of-Heaven, who plays a prominent role in Kwakiutl lore and ceremonies[14] (see Plate 11). This monster is one of several fearsome man-eating creatures believed to live in the far north who return in the winter to prey on humans and cause them to become cannibals. This mask features especially during the Kwakiutl winter ceremonies of Tseyka (or Tsetseka). These complex rituals often span several days with the dance of the Hamatsa being the most dramatic.

> The Hamatsa, protegé and personification of the Man-eater, returns from the monster's house and is captured and tamed by the tribesmen. His gradual return to human sense in a series of dances is disrupted when he loses his self-control and runs wildly around the firelit floor and out behind a painted curtain . . . From behind that screen the snapping of a great beak sounds, the singers begin the song of the masks, and a figure . . . appears. First stepping high from side to side, then

> circling in crouching jumps, and finally sitting on the floor, the dancer moves the great mask, sweeping and cocking the beak from side to side and finally snapping the voracious jaws. At each new verse another dancer appears . . . Then they leave one by one and the Hamatsa returns for his final series of dances by which his wildness is removed and he is brought back to a tame, human state.[15]

As the preceding quote well indicates, it is always critical to remember that any ceremonial objects were originally designed and intended to function as aspects of multifaceted, vibrant, and often dramatic performances. When displayed in galleries and museum collections, they have been removed from their context. In addition, many pieces of Native American art housed in museums today were acquired via extremely unethical means and in that way also have been deprived of their original sanctity and power.[16]

Powerful life-prolonging and health-promoting ceremonies connected with the Midewiwin Society (associated with several Plains Indian groups) involved use of special objects, spirit figures, and headdresses, in initiation rituals signaling a member's acceptance into the society after lengthy instructions in healing rites and moral codes of conduct. Various levels of achievement within the society brought different responsibilities, knowledge, and the privilege to handle and use sacred objects. The objects used in these ceremonies were carefully stored and guarded as containers of sacred powers (see Figure 6.6).



Figure 6.6 Midewiwin Society Spirit Figure and Headdress. Washington, DC: Museum of the American Indian. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

Special garments, such as men's shirts and women's dresses, were created during the mid- to late 19th century especially among several Plains Indians groups for use in Ghost Dance rituals (see Figure 6.7). The Ghost Dance was a movement that arose from the visions and teachings of several prophetic figures who foresaw renewal of life, power, and prosperity for Native Americans. During this period, when many native groups were enduring severe hardships and deprivations, the hope of reunion with deceased ancestors on a reborn and harmonious earth was extremely appealing, as well as serving, among some groups, as a vehicle for resistance against the European oppressors.[17]

Many variations of chants and ritual associated with Ghost Dance practices developed. The cloth or buckskin gar-

ments created for use in the dances often include painted designs of traditional religious and cosmological symbols: sun, moon, and solar eclipse—during which visions had been received by the prophet Wovaka (ca. 1856–1932)—images of birds (such as crows and white-tailed magpies: messengers from the ancestors and guardian spirits), cedar trees, turtles, and buffalo. The garments are often fringed and include attached feathers. Several groups of practitioners among the Ghost Dancers believed that these sacred garments had protective powers and were able to stop bullets. This belief was dramatically disproved, especially at Wounded Knee in 1890, when scores of Lakota men, women, and children were massacred by military troops.



Figure 6.7 Arapaho Ghost Dance Dress, ca. 1890. The Art Archive / Chandler-Pohrt Collection, Gift of Mary J. and James R. Jundt / Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming / NA.204.4.

EXAMPLES

Great Serpent Mound

The Great Serpent Mound, located in Adams County, southern Ohio, is one of the most impressive and well preserved of ancient earthworks in North America (see Figure 6.8). It has long fascinated and puzzled researchers since its discovery in the mid-19th century. Although a series of archaeological excavations have been undertaken at the site in the 19th and 20th centuries, and much scholarship continues to be devoted to the Great Serpent Mound, its exact purpose and date remain uncertain.

It is classified as an effigy mound, meaning that it represents the giant shape of a creature—in this case, a long snake undulating for a total length of over 1,300 feet atop a bluff overlooking a creek. It terminates in a tightly coiled tail, and its head is represented by a hollow, oval-shaped mound (variously interpreted as depicting the eye of the serpent or as the serpent's open mouth clasping an egg, the sun, or a body of a frog). The average width of the mounded body varies from 20 to 25 feet, and the height varies between 4 to 5 feet. "The ancient builders of Serpent Mound carefully planned this oversized effigy by first outlining a monstrous snake nearly one-quarter of a mile long with small stones and lumps of clay. They then piled up countless basket loads of yellow clay over the outline, burying their markers. The result is a flawlessly modeled serpent, forever slithering northward."[18]



Figure 6.8 Great Serpent Mound, Ohio. The Art Archive / Global Book Publishing.

Similar, smaller effigy mounds exist elsewhere (notably in parts of Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) that represent the shapes of various birds, lizards, turtles, and other animals such as deer, bears, bison, and panthers. Effigy mounds are distinguished by their shapes from the hundreds of other conical or platform temple mounds also widely distributed in the eastern and Midwestern United States. Excavations have revealed that the temple mounds generally served as burial places, and were also often topped with (no longer extant) wooden structures.[19] Effigy mounds, in contrast, generally contain no evidence of having been used as burial sites or as locales for temples or other architectural structures.

For many years, scholars attributed the construction of the Great Serpent Mound to the Adena or Hopewell cultures, which flourished in the region during the first millennium BCE up to about 500 CE. The Adena and Hopewell peoples were ambitious mound builders and constructed many impressive burial mounds, which were often filled with lavish and ornamental objects as well as more utilitarian grave goods.[20]

More recent study of the Great Serpent Mound, however, has placed its date much later into the early second millennium CE, ca. 1000–1100 CE. Archaeologists working at the site in the 1990s discovered several charcoal fragments that (via radiocarbon dating analysis) revealed a date of ca. 1070 CE, thus perhaps associating the mound with the Fort Ancient peoples, one of numerous Mississippian cultures that flourished between about 750 and 1500 CE. Nevertheless, the date of the Great Serpent Mound, as well as the purpose and function of the monument, remains a topic of much scholarly debate.

Typical of many other effigy mounds, the Great Serpent Mound was not used for burial purposes. "This suggests to some that the effigies defined sacred, ceremonial ground rather than mortuary areas."[21] Some scholars believe that the effigy mounds served as markers of territory, as representations of totemic creatures associated with specific clans or groups, as gathering places for religious ceremonies, as ritual devices to connect with animal spirits, or as evidence of ancient astronomical study. Indeed, the late 11th-century date proposed for the Great Serpent Mound

> corresponds almost exactly to two amazing astronomical events. In AD 1054, light from the supernova that produced the Crab nebula first reached the earth, remaining visible during daytime for at least two weeks. Then, in AD 1066, Halley's Comet appeared in its brightest manifestation ever, visible around the world. Could it be that some Native American observers in the Ohio River valley set out to create a permanent memorial to these remarkable celestial events? Maybe the wriggling earthwork is not a serpent at all; could the oval (the "egg") actually represent the head of Halley's Comet, with the "serpent's body" actually representing its fiery tail?[22]

Many other theories have been proposed about the meaning and symbolism of the Great Serpent Mound. Snakes play a prominent and powerful role in the religious beliefs of many Native American groups, sometimes as embodiments of evil and danger, other times as protective and benevolent spirits, or as symbols of eternity, renewal, growth, and transformation (via shedding skin). Perhaps the Great Serpent Mound was used for ceremonies celebrating renewal and the cycles of the year. It has been suggested that groups of people might have walked the outlines of the mound, moving "in solemn procession from the serpent's tail until arriving at the head. There the celebrants 'reversed' direction—perhaps during a solstice or equinox, when the seasons likewise turned around—and headed downward again, to be symbolically reborn and renewed for another annual cycle."[23]

"Have we heard the final word about the Great Serpent Mound? Probably not. But one thing is certain. Serpent Mound . . . still bewilders. It still has magnetism. And if we continue to protect its fragile profiles, it always will."[24]

Navajo Sand Painting Textile

The Navajo, who today represent the largest group of Native American people, are the descendants of nomadic hunters who originally migrated from Alaska and Canada to arrive in the Southwest sometime between 1200 and 1500 CE. "These newcomers to the Southwest were adaptable and innovative, transforming aspects of Pueblo religion and art into a distinctly Navajo . . . configuration."[25] Among the most distinctive forms of art associated with the Navajo, the creation and use of temporary images in the form of sand paintings (or dry paintings) is perhaps the most well known and, in some ways,

also the most puzzling to Western-trained scholars whose idea of art involves values of longevity and endurance (see Plate 12). Sand paintings are ephemeral forms of religious expression, created for specific purposes, charged with powerful symbolism, created by trained specialists, and always destroyed after use. Although some of the designs and symbols of sand paintings have been captured in more permanent forms (such as the woven rug example illustrated in Plate 12), and the production of permanent sand paintings for commercial/secular purposes became a major aspect of Navajo economy in the 20th century, these permanent examples are to be firmly distinguished from the traditional use of sand paintings in religious rituals.[26]

> The Navajo word for sandpainting (*'iikááh*) means "place where the gods come and go." Sandpaintings serve as impermanent altars where ritual actions can take place. But they are much more than that. In their proper setting, if ritual rules are followed, they are the exact pictorial representation of supernaturals. These stylized designs are full of sacred symbols and through consecration are impregnated with supernatural power, thereby becoming the temporary resting place of holiness. They are essential parts of curing ceremonies whose purpose is to attract the Holy People so that they will help with the complex curing process. The supernatural power sandpaintings contain is considered dangerous, and they can be safely used only in the proper controlled context, at the right time, under the direction of highly trained specialists.[27]

The specialists who create sand paintings and who conduct the ceremonies associated with their use are known as *hataalí* (singers, chanters, or medicine men.) The ceremonies are elaborate, multistaged events that can involve the creation of numerous sand paintings of particular designs in specifically ordered sequences, over a period of several days. Sand paintings are created to promote healing or a restoration of harmony and balance (either physical or psychological) in the individuals for whom they are created. Careful preparations are involved on the part of the trained singer who creates and chants the sacred blessings, traditional myths, and songs associated with the specific needs of individuals in need of healing. Sand paintings serve as an integral part of this process, as the individuals for whom the ceremonies are performed are asked to sit on or within the paintings during important moments of the ceremonies while the singer performs sacred chants to evoke the healing powers of the spirits.

Sand paintings are created from crushed, colored minerals carefully sprinkled either onto a bed of sand laid out on the earthen floor of hogan, or onto a buckskin base. Crushed flowers, pollen, corn meal, powdered bark, and roots may also be employed in sand paintings or as coloring agents. Paintings can vary greatly in size; some may be created in an area of a foot or less while the diameters of larger paintings can be up to 20 feet or more. These larger examples may require that several men work for many hours on their creation, while the smaller examples may be completed in a few hours by one or more artists. There are two basic compositional patterns traditionally employed: rows of figures

enclosed with boundary lines on three sides or centralized designs radiating from a focal point, also enclosed by boundary lines on three sides. In all cases, the symbolic elements and colors are carefully chosen to accord with the traditional sacred designs appropriate for each ceremony or chant.

There are hundreds of different chants and related images created in sand paintings. Although scholars and researchers of Navajo culture and religion have been extremely active in defining and categorizing these different chants and their related pictorial imagery, the symbols and images are really not meant to be accessible to outsiders but, rather, form a critical aspect of the highly sacred and guarded lore of the Navajo people. The power of the images and the efficacy of the rituals depend on their sacred status. That is why commercial works of art produced for collectors and tourists may replicate some aspects of these sacred designs in decorative form but are not used, or intended to be used, for actual ritual purposes.

The woven rug example illustrated here includes designs associated with the Shooting Way Chant, one of many ceremonial healing rituals of the Navajo.[28] The Shooting Way Chant and related sand paintings are primarily intended to recreate balance in an individual who is suffering from various illnesses including colds and fevers, or to prevent infection caused by lightning strikes, snakes, and arrows. The composition is typically clear, symmetric, and carefully organized to show the four directions (north, south, east, and west) with east at the top. Unlike many Western style maps (especially of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance periods), the east as the direction of the rising sun is often indicated at the top of Navajo sand paintings. Unlike the other three cardinal directions, the east is often represented as unbounded and unenclosed by boundary lines. This is the direction that the patient faces when sitting in the painting, and the direction from which the properly evoked healing powers will arrive.

This design is bounded by zigzagging arrow/lightning forms. Images of the Four Thunders (of the four cardinal directions) and Four Sacred Plants (corn, tobacco, squash, and beans) radiate from the central element. The central circle represents the home of the Thunder People; it is shown as a lake with four rectangular rainbow forms. The east (top of the painting) is protected by two guardian figures. The Thunders are represented as birdlike forms with outstretched wings from which hang waterspouts and lightning rays. Triangular arrows project from the tops and tips of their wings. Their lozenge-shaped tails contain symbols representing rain. Curving forms indicating thunder sounds also project from their tails. Their bodies are enriched with short rectangular forms symbolizing rainbows.

There are hundreds of different designs and compositions associated with the Shooting Way Chant, and singers select those patterns that will best suit the healing needs of the individual patient.

> According to Navajo belief, a sandpainting heals because the ritual image attracts and exalts the Holy People; serves as a pathway for the mutual exchange of ill-

> ness and the healing power of the Holy People; identifies the patient with the Holy People it depicts; and creates a ritual reality in which the patient and the supernatural dramatically interact, reestablishing the patient's correct relationship with the world of the Holy People.[29]

Hopi Kachina

Kachinas (or *katsinam*) are spirit beings who feature prominently in the religious beliefs and social customs of several Native American groups of the Southwest, notably the Hopi, Zuni, and Tewa peoples.[30] Kachina dolls (or *tithu*) are small, carved, painted, and decorated wooden images representing the spirit beings who otherwise appears as masked performers in elaborate and extensive yearly ceremonies (see Figure 6.9). *Tithu* are not dolls in the conventional sense but, rather, function as powerful symbols and reminders of the important role of the kachinas. Although these objects are often given to small infants of both sexes, and thereafter only to young girls, they are not designed as toys or playthings but are displayed (often hung on walls or rafters in homes) and are "treated respectfully, as blessings."[31]



Figure 6.9 Hopi Kachina, 20th century. Private collection. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

> The kachinas have distinct but interdependent manifestations—first, as spirit beings; second, as the physical counterparts of the spirit when they are given substance and personality through masks, costumes, paint, symbols, and actions by human impersonators, who thereby cease being ordinary people and are transformed into spirits; and third, by the small wooden effigies called *kachin-tihus* by the Hopi and kachina dolls by outsiders.[32]

The ultimate origins of the kachinas and the practices associated with them are matters of some speculation. Spanish explorers and settlers of the Southwest in the 16th century noted the customs and rituals of the Pueblo peoples, including the dances and ceremonies associated with the kachinas. Many scholars believe that these practices have very ancient roots in the region and see evidence in rock art and pottery depictions of masked figures and spirit beings from perhaps as early as the 11th through 14th centuries CE.[33] Some scholars have speculated that the carved wooden *tithu*

were partially inspired by the painted, sculptural depictions of saints and holy figures brought to the region by European settlers and Christian missionaries. Very few surviving kachina images predate the 19th century, however, and from that time to the present day, the production of carved *tithu* (especially among the Hopi) has also increased in response to the interests of collectors and tourists with many examples—in an evolving variety of styles—being produced purely for commercial rather than religious purposes.[34]

In religious contexts, "Katsina rituals are directly linked to the seasonal demands of agriculture."[35] Among the Hopi, the kachina season lasts from the winter solstice to the summer solstice, whereas among other groups (for example, Zuni) the kachina rituals take place throughout the year. The kachina are regarded as bringers of life, spirit beings whose benevolence ensures growth, fertility, and success in agriculture—especially in their ability to bring rain to these hot and arid regions. In some versions of Hopi mythology regarding the kachina, it is told that ancestral peoples, suffering through a great drought, heard singing and dancing in the nearby mountains. They traveled to the mountains and met the spirit beings (kachina), who returned with them to their villages and assisted them with a successful farming season. This annual return of the kachina spirits is celebrated by their appearance in the form of costumed figures who, for six months "live with the Hopi people, performing ceremonies for them in the kivas during the cold winter months and dancing in the plazas in spring and early summer for the enjoyment of all."[36] They are "welcomed and treasured as powerful friends and guardians who bring gifts of rain, crops, bird songs, flowers, summer greenery, happiness, health, and long life."[37]

The number and appearance of the kachinas varies widely between regions, villages, and clans. Kachinas represent a living tradition, with the knowledge of the meaning and power of specific kachinas closely guarded by elders and revealed via initiation rites held at important stages in the lives of community members. "A veil of secrecy surrounds each kachina society and clan, privileged information and responsibilities are passed down through generations to each exclusive group."[38] The forms of the kachinas have evolved and transformed over the centuries. It is estimated that between two to three hundred spirit beings are (or have been) recognized, many of which appear only during specific ceremonies such as Soyal (the winter solstice ceremony, which marks the return of the kachinas), Powamu (the Bean Dance), the Water Serpent ceremony, and Niman (the Home Dance, or summer solstice ceremony, which thanks and celebrates the kachinas before their seasonal departure). The attributes of the kachinas are varied, bespeaking their different natures and spirit essences, with the costumes, masks, and *tithu* often showing characteristics of flowers and plants (cactus, corn), birds (eagles and owls), snakes, animals (such as deer, bears, and mountain lions), or symbols of clouds, rain, the sun, morning, and symbols representing powerful warrior and leader figures. Kachinas are both male and female, although only men perform in the rituals and dances. Some kachinas are playful, others are frightening and severe. Specific color

symbolism is also used, relating to "the six different sacred directions. North is represented by blue or green, west by yellow, south by red, east by white, zenith by multicolors, and nadir by black."[39]

The 20th-century Hopi *tihu* illustrated represents a *katsinmana,* a maiden or female spirit, wearing an elaborate stepped headdress (or *tablita*) representing the impressive headgear worn by costumed dancers in ceremonies. *Tithu* are traditionally carved from the dense, dry roots of dead cottonwood trees; many are painted in vibrant colors and often have attachments of feathers and plant materials. Zuni *tithu* are often clothed in costumes of animal skin or woven cloth. *Tithu* are carved by artists versed in the craft and ancient traditions, who are familiar with the traditional forms and symbolism. Before the modern period, *tithu* (such as the example illustrated) largely appear as static standing figures, without bases. Modern *tithu* often show more active stances, may have moveable limbs, and are placed on carved bases.

Northwest Coast Totem Poles

The creation of carved wooden totem poles is characteristic of several native peoples of the Pacific Northwest (see Figure 6.10). Totem poles represent the largest freestanding sculptures created by native peoples of North America, as well as some of the largest wooden sculptures ever created worldwide. They have "become the very symbol of Northwest Coast native people and their art."[40]



Figure 6.10 Totem Poles, Vancouver, Canada. The Art Archive / Stephanie Colasanti.

Due to the wet climate and perishable nature of the material, few totem poles presently exist that predate the mid- to late 19th century; however, the art form continues to be vibrantly practiced today. The first Europeans to reach the Pacific Northwest Coast in the late 18th century described seeing impressive and intriguing carved posts on the interiors and exteriors of native dwellings; even so, it remains unclear when the art form originated and for how long it had developed before European contact. The evolu-

tion of the large, freestanding totem pole can be traced primarily in the late 19th and 20th century.

While it has been argued that these carved monuments are nonreligious in nature, and served primarily secular purposes in displaying symbols, objects, and animals associated with specific families or clans (as "the equivalent of a European crest or coat of arms"), many of the images carved on totem poles are not simply decorative designs but many have their origins in ancient myths of supernatural beings, animals, and their encounters with ancestral figures.[41] Although totem poles are not themselves objects of worship, they often include important religious symbolism.

> The people's understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things and their dependence on certain animal and plant species fostered belief in the supernatural and spirit world . . . To show these spirits respect ensured their continued return or regrowth in the years ahead. . . . The people's spirituality ran deep, and their sense of identity was strong. Through costumed spiritual transformation and re-enactments, they brought past histories and adventures into the present. Thus, the carved beings of crests and legend portrayed on the totem poles, often recreated in masks worn by dancers, sprang to life. When the dances and ceremonies ended, the sculptured poles in front of the houses continued to confirm the identity and rank of those who dwelt there.[42]

Totem poles are traditionally carved of red cedar trees from which the bark has been stripped. Carving is done by a team—often a master carver with several assistants. Appendages such as beaks, wings, and fins are added by pegging or mortise and tenon joints. Once painted, poles are raised in stages by teams of people using ropes and wooden supports or scaffolds. Although heights of totem poles vary widely, many are as much as 80 feet or more tall.

The completion of the undertaking could be integrated into the ceremonial event known as a "potlatch" ("to give away").[43] Potlatches were elaborate events regularly orchestrated by many Northwest Coast peoples. These were times of gift-giving, feasting, dancing, religious rituals, and affirmation of the wealth and prestige of the hosting family or clan. Often held in conjunction with a major event, such as a marriage or a death, potlatches involved the host's distribution of gifts to all attendees.

The designs of totem poles often include images or crests associated with specific clans.

> The central feature of the ceremonial art of the Northwest Coast is the concept of the "crest"—family, clan, or lineage-owned badges—representing natural phenomena, mythical creatures and ancestors. Many of these are likely to have originated as spirit helpers of individuals, handed down from one generation to another, so that symbols of religious origins may have in time become transformed into symbols of family or political significance.[44]

Traditional designs include the powerful thunderbird spirit (always shown with great wings outstretched—as in the examples illustrated), raven (revered by many Pacific Northwest groups as the creator of the world), wolf (symbol of strength and prowess in hunting), eagle (symbol of prestige and strength), bear (symbol of power), symbols of the sun and moon, and numerous other animals, zoomorphs, and human figures. Northwest Coast art represents a series of distinctive styles based on "a general system of design principles. Depending on how these are used, the crest or motif being portrayed can vary from realistic and easily recognizable to involved and somewhat difficult to figure out—or the identity of the figure can become totally abstracted through the rearrangement of its anatomical parts."[45]

Many totem poles created today still follow the traditional imagery and design structure, though they may be created for nontraditional purposes (commissioned by corporations, government agencies, museums, and educational centers) and they may also be created of more durable modern materials (such as fiberglass). Even so, they preserve the traditional forms, "proclaiming the people's pride in their past and the strength of their culture, now and in the future."[46]

NOTES

1. Brian Fagan, *The Great Journey: The Peopling of Ancient America* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 15.

2. Opinions on this diverge widely. Some cultural groups dislike the term "Native American" because for them it represents a misguided and politically correct academic attempt at whitewashing the historical facts—including the original European misnaming of the peoples of America. Having been mislabeled as Indians, and perceived and treated for so many years as foreign peoples inferior to whites, some peoples prefer to retain the term "Indian" as it continues to symbolize the history of their perception and mistreatment by Europeans. Thus, after years of being called Indians, many groups still prefer this term and now dislike being called Native Americans. Ideally, all Indian/Native American groups should be referred to by their actual names: Zuni, Hopi, Cherokee, and so forth. See the useful and provocative discussion by Christina Berry, "What's in a Name? Indians and Political Correctness," *All Things Cherokee*, http://www.allthingscherokee.com/articles_culture_events_070101.html.

3. For a detailed discussion see Fagan, *The Great Journey,* especially 101–44.

4. Fagan, *The Great Journey,* 239.

5. Regarding the Great Mother figure, see Kathleen Dugan, "At the Beginning Was Woman: Women in Native American Religious Traditions," in *Religion and Women,* ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 39–60.

6. Maureen Korp, *Sacred Art of the Earth: Ancient and Contemporary Earthworks* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 52.

7. Jeremy Schmidt, *In the Spirit of Mother Earth: Nature in Native American Art* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), 27.

8. The literature on shamanism is extensive. Useful sources include: Miranda Aldhouse-Green and Stephen Aldhouse-Green, *The Quest for the Shaman: Shape-Shifters, Sorcerers, and Spirit-Healers of Ancient Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson,

2005); John Halifax, *Shaman: The Wounded Healer* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982); Norman Hunt, *Shamanism in North America* (Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books, 2003); and Allen Wardwell, *Tangible Visions: Northwest Coast Indian Shamanism and Its Art* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1996).

9. J. J. Brody, *The Anasazi: Ancient Indian People of the American Southwest* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990).

10. Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton, *Native American Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 376.

11. Nabokov and Easton, 11.

12. Nabokov and Easton, 38.

13. Barbara Tedlock, "Zuni Sacred Theater," *American Indian Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1983): 94.

14. Bill Holm, *Crooked Beak of Heaven: Masks and Other Ceremonial Art of the Northwest Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972).

15. Bill Holm, *Spirit and Ancestor: A Century of Northwest Coast Art at the Burke Museum* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 100.

16. Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips, "Our (Museum) World Turned Upside-Down: Re-Presenting Native American Arts," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 1 (1995): 6–10.

17. Gregory Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity: Prophetic Religion and American Indian Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

18. David Thomas, *Exploring Ancient Native America: An Archaeological Guide* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 130.

19. Maureen Korp, *The Sacred Geography of the American Mound Builders* (Lewisten, NY: E. Mellen, 1990).

20. See Brian Fagan, *From Black Land to Fifth Sun: The Science of Sacred Sites* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998), especially chapter 9, "The Moundbuilders of Eastern North America," 184–219.

21. Thomas, 144.

22. Thomas, 133.

23. Peter Nabokov, *Where the Lightning Strikes: The Lives of American Indian Sacred Places* (New York: Viking, 2006), 38.

24. Thomas, 133.

25. Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.

26. Nancy Parezo, *Navajo Sandpainting: From Religious Act to Commercial Art* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

27. Parezo, 1.

28. Franc Newcomb, *Sandpaintings of the Navajo Shooting Chant* (New York: Dover, 1975); Gladys Reichard, *Navajo Medicine Man: Sandpaintings* (New York: Dover, 1977); Leland Wyman, *Sandpaintings of the Navaho Shootingway and the Walcott Collection* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1970).

29. Trudy Griffin-Pierce, *Native Peoples of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 337.

30. The use and spelling of terminology varies. Some scholars prefer to use the term *katsina* (plural: *katsinam*) to refer to the spirit beings themselves, as differentiated from their carved representation in the form of dolls (kachina; plural: kachinas). The term *tihu* (plural *tithu*) is also used for kachina dolls. See Helga Teiwes, *Kachina Dolls: The Art of Hopi Carvers* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press,1991), 145.

31. Teiwes, 33.
32. Peter Furst and Jill Furst, *North American Indian Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), 30.
33. Polly Schaafsma and Curtis Schaafsma, "Evidence for the Origins of the Pueblo Katchina Cult as Suggested by Southwestern Rock Art," *American Antiquity* 39, no. 4 (1974): 535–45, and Polly Schaafsma, "The Prehistoric Kachina Cult and Its Origins as Suggested by Southwestern Rock Art," in *Kachinas in the Pueblo World,* ed. Polly Schaafsma (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 63–79.
34. J. J. Brody, "Kachina Images in American Art: The Way of the Doll," in *Kachinas in the Pueblo World,* ed. Polly Schaafsma (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 147–60.
35. Teiwes, 11.
36. Teiwes, 11.
37. Furst and Furst, 30.
38. Lois Jacka, *Art of the Hopi: Contemporary Journeys on Ancient Pathways* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland, 1998), 7.
39. Dorothy Washburn, "Kachina: Window to the Hopi World," in *Hopi Kachina: Spirit of Life,* ed. Dorothy Washburn (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), 42.
40. Hilary Stewart, *Looking at Totem Poles* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 13.
41. David Campbell, ed., *Native American Art and Folklore: A Cultural Celebration* (Avenel, NJ: Crescent Books, 1993), 155.
42. Stewart, *Looking at Totem Poles*, 17.
43. For information on potlatches, see Aldona Jonaitis, ed., *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakliutl Potlatch* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1991), and Joseph Masco, "Competitive Displays: Negotiating Genealogical Rights to the Potlatch at the American Museum of Natural History," *American Anthropologist* 88, no. 4 (1996): 837–52.
44. John Mack, ed., *Masks and the Art of Expression* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 116–17.
45. Hilary Stewart, *Looking at Indian Art of the Northwest Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 16.
46. Stewart, *Looking at Totem Poles,* 23.

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—7—

Indigenous Religions of Oceania

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Oceania refers to a vast region of the world traditionally comprising the continent of Australia and the numerous Pacific Island groups of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. The geographic scope of the region is enormous and often is demarcated in different ways. For purposes of this present study, Australia is included as one of the four major Oceanic regions, along with the three large Pacific Island groups—themselves representing thousands of lands of various sizes situated across millions of miles in the Pacific Ocean. From the outset, it is important to note that the terms *Polynesia*, *Melanesia*, and *Micronesia* all reflect names developed by European explorers in the 18th and 19th centuries and thus "there is a certain artificiality about the demarcation of such regions which have had waves of migration and degrees of cultural overlap."[1]

Polynesia (a term meaning "many islands") comprises a huge expanse of the Pacific Ocean and includes, at its southernmost range, the islands of New Zealand and, at its northernmost range, the Hawaiian Islands. Polynesia stretches to the east as far as Easter Island, an isolated locale 2,000 miles from the Chilean coast of South America, and also includes Tahiti, the Marquesas, Society, and Cook Islands. Fiji is often considered to be part of Polynesia, although it may also be included in Melanesia. *Melanesia* (a term meaning "islands of the blacks") includes the large island of New Guinea, plus numerous islands and island groups including the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, New Britain, New Ireland, and the Admiralties. *Micronesia* (a term meaning "small islands") includes thousands of little islands north of New Guinea and east of

the Philippines in several major archipelagos: the Marshalls, Carolines, Marianas, and Gilberts.

Evidence of human presence and activity in Oceania is of widely divergent dates. Some areas (such as New Guinea and Australia) were populated extremely early in the prehistoric period by peoples migrating from Asia, when water levels were much lower and land masses now separated were closer or even connected. Some rock paintings and engravings in Australia, for example, have been dated to as early as 30,000–20,000 BCE, and evidence of human activity in New Guinea is similarly ancient. In other regions of Oceania, however, human habitation is relatively more recent. Around 3000 BCE, the Lapita culture (from southeast Asia or the Philippines) became established in Melanesia and, during the second and first millennia BCE, began to expand to various Polynesian islands such as Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. The Lapitas were accomplished sailors and traders and used "outrigger canoes and highly developed navigational skills involving knowledge of prevailing winds, open water currents, cloud patterns over land areas, bird behavior, and the positions of the stars" to travel impressively vast distances.[2] Many of the Micronesian islands were reached (probably from the Philippines and Indonesia) by non-Lapitan cultures around 2000 BCE. By the first century BCE, descendants of the Lapita culture traveled to the islands of the Marquesas. Over the subsequent centuries, more regions were populated by settlers. The far-flung islands of Hawaii to the north and Easter Island to the southeast were reached by the sixth or fifth century CE. Peoples from the Marquesas reached the Cook, Austral, and Society Islands by ca. 600 CE and from there traveled southwest to New Zealand probably by the 9th or 10th century CE, making New Zealand "the last large habitable area of the world to be populated."[3]

> Other contacts between the various Polynesian peoples occurred after these initial migrations. Voyages from Tahiti to Hawaii and New Zealand in the eleventh century have been surmised, and intermittent connections between the various island groups undoubtedly were made over the centuries before the coming of the Europeans. . . . However, periods of isolation allowed for independent development, which of course accounts in part for the distinctive artistic expressions to be found on each of the island groups.[4]

The vast region of the world represented by Oceania was largely unknown to Europeans until the 16th-century voyages of exploration in the Age of Discovery. The Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan (1481–1521) was one of the first Europeans to sail to the Philippines (where he was killed). Magellan is also credited with naming the Pacific Ocean (Mare Pacificum, "peaceful ocean"). Spanish explorers in the 16th century reached New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The 17th-century Dutch explorer Abel Janszoon Tasman (1603–1659) discovered New Zealand and the southern Australian island of Tasmania. In the 18th century, French explorers reached many Polynesian islands, and the

English explorer James Cook (1728–1799), in several major voyages, contacted eastern Australia and the Hawaiian Islands (where he was killed).

The term "Polynesia" (originally meaning all the Pacific Islands) was first used by the French writer Charles de Brosses (1709–1777) and later refined by the French explorer Jules Sébastien César Dumont d'Urville (1790–1842), who made several voyages in the Pacific, to Australia, New Zealand, and as far as Antarctica. Dumont d'Urville is credited with devising the term "Oceania" (for the entire region) and the differentiating terms "Micronesia" and "Melanesia," as regions distinct from "Polynesia."

European explorers were interested in trade and colonization, gaining wealth and territory. They were also interested in cartography, geography, geology, natural history, botany, and the customs of the strange and foreign people they encountered in their voyages.

> Another appeal of the Pacific for the European public lay in the idealized expectation of a Pacific paradise. This has ancient roots in the myth of a lost paradise and a nostalgia for recovering it. In the eighteenth century Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712–1778] voiced the idea of the "noble savage" who was a child of nature, unspoilt by Western civilization. It is not surprising therefore that this expectation could feed on travellers' tales of idyllic ease and freedom from restraints in the Pacific.[5]

This idealized freedom from conventional restraints also resulted in much disastrous European exploitation of the indigenous peoples of Oceania, who were often viewed much less as noble savages but as primitive and backwards peoples in need of Western civilizing influence and corrected religious beliefs. While many ethnographers and Christian missionaries were instrumental in gathering information on indigenous beliefs and religious practices, the tasks of converting peoples to Christianity in many cases resulted in the wholesale destruction of art works and objects deemed pagan. Ultimately, in Oceania, "as a result of the missionary work by Christian churches, the majority of peoples have been converted to some form of Christianity which has now become indigenized in varying degrees."[6] Nevertheless, many ancient traditions still live on, in various degrees of preservation or modification, or can be reconstructed through archaeological and documentary records.

It is important to note also that a number of religious art works from Oceania, now found in world museum collections, were given to missionaries as symbols of the people's conversion to Christianity. Such practices are, of course, not unknown at all in other world regions when new imported religious traditions replace or supplement older traditions. For example, the carved wooden figure of the god A'a (or Tangaroa), among the most celebrated works of Oceanic art in the collection of the British Museum in London, was gifted to the missionary John Williams by people from the island of Rurutu (Austral Islands, Polynesia) in 1821 (see Figure 7.1). A'a was one of several figures presented to the



Figure 7.1 The god A'a, wood, Rurutu, Austral Islands. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

missionaries, indicating the people's acceptance of Christianity by giving up their old gods and beliefs. This wooden figure, about 44 inches tall, depicts the god A'a in the process of creating other gods and humans, indicated as little figures springing forth from and clinging to his body. The object has a removable back and may have originally served as a container for human bones. The London Missionary Society produced several replicas of this piece in the 19th century, not due to aesthetic appreciation or interest in the cultural context of the object, but "in order to demonstrate as widely as possible to its supporters 'how hideous pagan idols could be.'"[7] The French artist Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) had a bronze cast of this image created, and objects such as this provided a great deal of inspiration for many Western artists of the 20th century.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

The geographic vastness and cultural diversity of Oceania poses challenges for any discussion of principal beliefs and key religious practices. The peoples of this widespread region all developed distinctive sets of beliefs and customs. Even so, it may be possible to identify several common themes related to views about the creation of the universe, the position and role of humans, death, ancestors, and the world of spirits.

> Most of the art of Oceania is religious by nature. It is made in response to a series of related beliefs that the universe is governed by invisible forces that can determine and influence the events of life. These forces are thought to be everywhere. While they do not actually cause the behavior and nature of inanimate objects and living beings or the inexplicable phenomena of the world, they are expressed by them. Through these forces, a mystical relationship between the people and the elements of their environment is established.[8]

Creation and Dreamtime

Among the many Aboriginal cultures of Australia is a shared belief in the Dreaming or Dreamtime—when the world came into being. During this time, ancestral spirits emerged from beneath the ground or from elsewhere and took on the shape of primeval animals, natural elements, and some human characteristics. These beings (such as the Rainbow Serpents, Lightning Men, Tingari,

and Wandjina) shaped the surface of the earth and created the landscape, ultimately withdrawing or transforming themselves into landscape features but also leaving behind a living body of sacred traditions, moral and ritual obligations to be followed by their heirs. It is important to see that the Dreamtime is understood to have "existed before individuals were born and will continue to exist after they have died; people play a role in keeping it alive and as a consequence are part of its change and transformation."[9] In other words, "the Dreaming is not an exercise of the imagination in sleep or fantasy but a spiritual outlook incarnated in traditional rites and in things and places in the world."[10] "The Dreaming is the overarching cosmic order within which Aboriginal people, both as individuals and as communities, are related to the environment as a living landscape. In this the ancestral past is a reality continuous with the present. It is a meaningful universe, filled with symbols."[11]



Figure 7.2 Bark painting, Mimi hunter and Kangaroo, 20th century, Western Arnheim Land. Private collection. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

Images of ancestral and spirit beings are frequently found in Aboriginal art, ranging in date from prehistoric rock paintings (see chapter 1, "Prehistoric Belief Systems") to more contemporary examples in a variety of media, which follow ancient traditions. For example, a 20th-century bark painting from Western Arnheim Land shows a scene of a kangaroo and a hunter (see Figure 7.2). Images of this nature are frequent in Aboriginal art, and paintings on bark are among the more common art forms of modern times.[12] The large kangaroo is depicted in what is known as X-ray style, in which the spine and internal organs of the animal are shown. In this case, the heart and lungs are represented by a three-lobed shape; the liver is shown by a four-lobed shape, and the stomach and intestines are also indicated.[13] The specific cross-hatched patterns (*rarrk*) often found in these paintings may "identify clans and imbue the object on which they are painted with the power of supernatural beings."[14] The small sticklike figure spearing the kangaroo is a *mimi* (or *mimih*) spirit; although not considered among the ancestral or creator beings, many stories of *mimi* and their encounters with humans in the Dreamtime are found in Aboriginal mythology.[15]

> Some spirit beings were friendly and helpful, others caused harm and had to be avoided or propitiated. The Mimi of Western Arnheim Land were typical of these spirit people. They lived on the rocky plateau where they had families, hunted, and made love, just as people did. The Mimi were so thin the wind would carry them away, so they travelled only on still days. If humans approached, the Mimi would blow on a large rock causing it to split. After the Mimi passed through, the rock would reseal itself.[16]

Other stories tell that the *mimi* taught humans how to hunt animals, cut them up and cook their meat, and that they also taught humans how to sing and dance and create rock paintings.

Gods, Spirits, and Ancestors

The simultaneous past/present continuity represented by the Dreamtime in Aboriginal thinking, although a unique cultural expression, finds reflections elsewhere in Oceania where beliefs in spirit forces and a sense of human connectedness to the environment are also extremely evident. In some societies, specific named deities were venerated, generally associated with natural forces or elements. For the Maori of New Zealand, for example, the four major deities active in the world were associated with the forests (the god Tane), the sea (the god Ta'aroa), land or agriculture (the god Rongo), and warfare (the god Ku). In Hawaii, the war god was also known as Ku (or Kuka'ilimoku, "the snatcher of land").

In Melanesia generally, specific deities were not worshiped, but a number of spirit forces active in the world were acknowledged, as is well demonstrated in the creation of painted spirit boards (*gope, koi, kwoi,* or *hohao*) typical of the Papuan Gulf region of New Guinea (see Plate 13). Often created from long boards taken from old canoes, these images typically represent specific spirits (or *imunu*) associated with particular land or sea elements whose powers were believed to assist and protect different clans of groups of people. Customarily displayed in shrines within communal dwelling houses, "the spirit boards . . . gazed down upon the living men below, the supernatural powers of the *imunu* ensuring the ongoing fertility and prosperity of the clan and its continuing success in war."[17] The example illustrated in Plate 13 was created in the late 19th or early 20th century by the Elema peoples and depicts a forest spirit wearing a shell necklace. The complete body of the figure is shown in this example, although many other variations exist that consist simply of a face or highly stylized body parts. The figure's navel is a prominent central motif typical of spirit board imagery. "The navel is said to be the element that supernaturally enlivens the board and likely served as the portal through which the spirit entered the board."[18] The prominent kneecaps of the figure are shown, one slightly higher than the other. This is meant to indicate that the spirit is dancing, as if participating in the ceremonial masked performances traditionally and frequently held to honor the spirits and seek their support.[19]

With few exceptions, ancestral spirits (of specific people or as symbols of clan lineages) also play an extremely important role in Oceanic religious beliefs and practices. Elaborate funerary rites, involving dancing, feasting, and the construction of specific shelters and ritual objects are customarily associated with the veneration of ancestral spirits. Although traditions vary from region to region, as well as the distinctive types of art forms produced and used, the

veneration of ancestral spirits is another common thread linking the diverse cultural groups of Oceania.

Mana and Tapu

The critical importance of maintaining traditions and customs is also generally evident in Oceanic social and religious practices. Many Oceanic societies share the underlying concepts of *mana* ("supernatural power linked with genealogical rank, fertility, and protocol") and *tapu* (restrictions which protect the maintenance of *mana*).[20] The terms *tapu* and *mana* may also be understood as "spiritual potential" and "realized potential," the powerful forces that govern the material world and the spiritual universe, the forces that affirm social order, earthly, and spiritual obligations.[21] "According to these principles, each society developed distinctive hierarchical traditions tied to sacred rituals in which special objects of art were used."[22] People, as well as objects, places, and natural elements, may be regarded as inherently imbued with, or having the potential to achieve, different degrees of *mana*. *Mana* was a powerful contagious force that could be lost or depleted by improper contacts and actions. The English word "taboo" derives from the terms *tabu*, *tapu*, and *kapu*.

"Taboo means forbidden, consecrated, placed under a ban or restriction, debarred from ordinary use, touch or treatment. In effect, taboo constituted a collection of laws that protected property, persons, and the life force of mana. . . . Mana and taboo prevailed at all times."[23] These concepts provide the essential underpinnings of many Oceanic societies, influencing customs, social roles, and the creation and use of art objects.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Studies of the traditional art and architectural forms of Oceania and Australia have faced many of the same challenges as in other world regions such as Africa (see chapter 8) and with other cultural groups, such as Native Americans (see chapter 6). Any discussion of native, tribal, or indigenous forms of art is always fraught with terminological controversies, especially when descriptors such as *primitive* are used. Western Europeans and Americans, when they came in contact with the arts of the Pacific Islanders, the Maori of New Zealand, and the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, found their forms of art difficult to understand. These strange and foreign peoples, their cultures, religious practices, lifestyles, and art seemed primitive and undeveloped to Western eyes, certainly not reflective of the types of art and architectural forms traditional in Western European societies and civilizations. Although certain Romanticized views of the noble savage, as well as idealized visions of a paradisiacal lifestyle represented by humans living in harmony with nature in the Pacific Island cultures, characterized much European discourse in the 18th and 19th centuries especially, the persistent and traditional use of the term *primitive* to describe

Oceanic art reflects the challenges faced by outsiders in approaching these different cultures as well as an attempt (well-intentioned or not) to describe the art forms and related religious practices of Oceanic peoples.

Much scholarship has been devoted to analyzing the powerful impressions that Oceanic as well as African art made on Western European artists of the 19th and 20th centuries. The French artist Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), for example, was notably inspired by his visions of the idyllic island lifestyle of the Polynesians to spend several years of his life living in Tahiti productively further developing his unique Post-Impressionist style inspired by the vibrant colors, themes, and motifs of the Polynesian ambiance he experienced or imagined.[24] The reactions of other early 20th-century Western artists, such as Pablo Picasso and his peers, to the displays of ethnographic materials exhibited in Paris in the early years of the 20th century have also inspired much scholarly discussion.[25] The ongoing reception and responses of Western artists to non-Western art forms and the influence of these arts on the development of early modern styles in Western art have been well investigated, as have the parallel if not reciprocal influences that Western art styles and modes of display and presentation have also had on the arts produced in Oceania, after contact with Europeans and to the present day.

Among the most challenging issues for scholars of Oceanic art are the traditional collection and display modes adopted for presentation of cultural artifacts typified by many museum installations in the past and present. Although collecting objects of interest or importance, and preserving and presenting these collections privately or publicly, has an extremely lengthy history in many cultures worldwide, collection and display modes often serve to create major artifices as well as promote knowledge and understanding. When works of art—which were never intended to be preserved, collected, or displayed or perhaps even viewed outside their original context—are extracted from their settings, these objects may be much admired, at best, but only as mute reflections of their original usage and significance.

It may be very useful and elucidating for art historians to study these works out of context, and, indeed, much substantial and very sensitive scholarship of this nature has been undertaken in the past several years. It is clear that certain styles and visual forms are typical of specific cultures of Oceania during particular time periods and that particular forms of religious art are most typical of specific cultures. Large-scale figural sculpture in materials such as stone and wood are common in Polynesia; the creation of masks for ceremonial purposes is most common in Melanesia; the complex elaboration of decorative designs is characteristic of Micronesian art; while the Maori of New Zealand and Aborigines of Australia have distinctive art traditions and styles as well.

These traditions continue—and continue to develop to the present day—often in the form of art produced for tourists and visitors, as well as in new modes that bespeak ancient traditions. This is another fraught and often discussed issue in studies of Oceanic art generally. While art works created by con-

temporary Australian Aborigines and other Pacific Island peoples may lack the same antique stamp as many objects that were so avidly collected by Europeans in previous centuries, in many ways these more modern works also need to be very seriously considered in the overall picture of Oceanic arts.[26]

Environmental and Ephemeral Art Forms of Oceania

A notable feature of Oceanic art is the diversity of materials employed. "The artists of the Pacific used almost anything from their natural environment to give expression to [their] beliefs . . . It seems that practically everything that existed was at some time skillfully worked into an element of visual expression."[27] For example, a 19th-century mask from the Melanesian island of New Ireland demonstrates the use of fiber, bark, and dried fruit peels (see Figure 7.3); many masks made from fiber, mud, and shells were created in the Sepik River areas of New Guinea (see Figure 7.4); *tapa* (unwoven bark cloth) and basketry frames were employed for many masks of New Guinea and elsewhere (see Figure 7.5); and the colorful and prized feathers of birds were often used in conjunction with other materials (see Figure 7.6). The Hawaiian Feather God illustrated in Figure 7.6 was an important ritual object, carried into battles by the priests of the war god. This particular feather and basketry sculpture also includes plaited human hair and a fearsome wide mouth lined with over a hundred dog teeth. This object was collected on one of Captain Cook's voyages and is presently located in the British Museum in London.

The use of organic and perishable materials (leaves, ferns, shells, nuts, moss, flowers, roots, grasses, and so on) indicates not only the fact that many objects of Oceanic art have long deteriorated or disappeared but also that the objects collected and displayed in museums today are but vague reflections of their original appearance.

> Not only have the grasses, leaves, fibers, and fruits that were originally attached to them long since fallen off, but those bits and pieces that remain are now dried out, brown, and lifeless, providing only a hint of the vibrancy and even more spectacular appearance they once had. This is particularly true of Melanesian art, much of

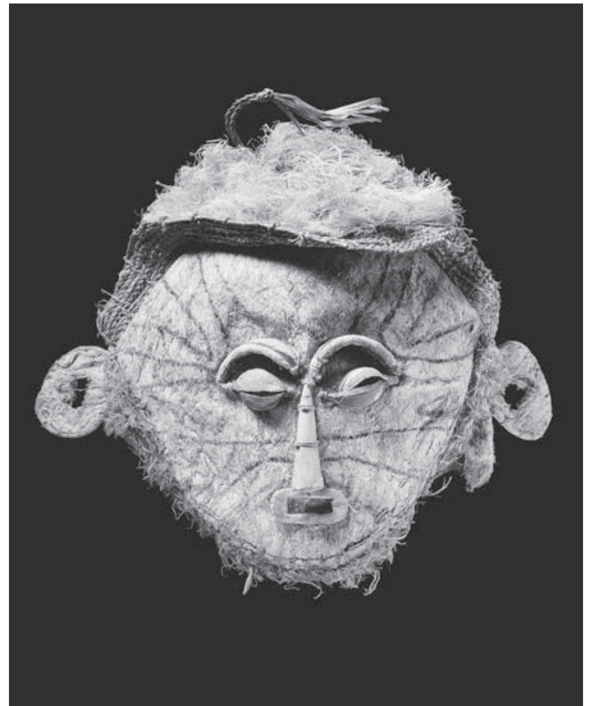


Figure 7.3 Mask from New Ireland, 19th century. Berlin: Ethnologisches Museum. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 7.4 Mask from Sepik River area, New Guinea. The Art Archive / Paris: Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens / Alfredo Dagli Orti.



Figure 7.5 Mask from Papua New Guinea. The Art Archive / Paris: Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens / Gianni Dagli Orti.

> which was newly created for each ceremony, or, if old, renewed with fresh materials before each ritual appearance.[28]

The process of preserving objects of this nature—and especially objects that were never intended to last—poses many challenges and issues for museum professionals.[29]

On the other hand, many Oceanic art forms were created with relatively more durable materials, such as wood, and extremely long-lasting materials, such as stone. These objects were certainly "made to last and were carefully kept and preserved so that they could be passed on from one generation to the next."[30] Several cultures in Oceania also developed impressive traditions of stone architectural construction, primarily in the form of ceremonial structures and enclosures used for burials and religious rituals. Such sites in Hawaii are known as *heiau* and often consisted of several large stone platforms with other (stone or wooden) structures built on them designed to house priests and store sacred ritual items and cult images representing various deities. *Heiau* traditionally include altars (*ahu*) on which sacrifices were offered. They were considered to be highly sacred enclosures with access restricted to priests (*kahuna*) and cer-

tain high chiefs (*ali'i*). Many of the surviving wood carvings of different Hawaiian deities were originally kept in *heiau*.[31] The term *marae* describes similar types of sacred enclosures found elsewhere in Oceania. Some were private, associated with individual families and used for ceremonies for deceased relatives, whereas larger official *marae* were often associated with specific tribal leaders and served as sites for ritual sacrifices of animals and humans.



Figure 7.6 Feather God, Hawaii, pre-19th century. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

EXAMPLES

Uli Figure

Uli (or *nalik*) figures, a characteristic art form of New Ireland, were created for the funerary ceremonies honoring prominent chiefs or head men (see Figure 7.7). Often of imposing size (the example illustrated is 52 inches tall), these carved and painted statues typically depict a specific individual whose spirit was believed to reside within the image. These statues were powerful and treasured possessions, created for grand and lengthy ceremonies involving feasting and dances. After their ceremonial use and display, the figures were typically carefully preserved and kept in communal dwellings; they were often repainted for use in further funerary ceremonies.

Uli figures are generally shown in "ceremonial dress in the form of wristlets, anklets, and a crested headpiece similar to those worn by people in times of mourning."[32] An especially striking characteristic of these figures is their hermaphroditic appearance, with female breasts and male genitalia. Although the figures are meant to represent male chiefs, it is believed that the addition of breasts "signified the importance of fertility and the chief's care for the women in the village."[33] Indeed, in some of the rituals associated with *uli* figures, it has been reported that male members of the community donned costumes with false breasts, further reinforcing this male/female symbolism.

Malagan Image

"Spectacular and ephemeral, the brightly painted *malagan* images of northern New Ireland are the most colorful and complex sculptures in the Pacific"[34] (see Figure 7.8). These sculptures were created for use and display in several



Figure 7.7 Uli Figure, 18th to 19th century, New Ireland. The Art Archive / Musée du Quai Branly Paris / Gianni Dagli Orti.

related ritual contexts, primarily for elaborate funerary commemorations marking the initial death of a community member and for the final and often prolonged period of mourning held in honor of, sometimes several, deceased community members. The creation and display of *malagan* images may also serve purposes such as ratifying social contracts, solving disputes, removing certain prohibitions, and validating transactions between clans or groups.[35] They are used in a variety of calendrical rites related to agriculture, and the advent, conclusion, and return of the seasons of the year. The term *malagan* (or *malaggan* or *malanggan*) refers not only to the carved images themselves but also to all the ceremonies and rituals with which they are associated. During funeral rituals and other rites, the images function "as temporary abodes for supernatural beings associated with the clan."[36] They were displayed in specially constructed shelters in enclosed courtyards within which the funerary rituals (dancing, feasting, sacrifices of pigs) were held. At the conclusion of the ceremonies, both the house and the *malagan* carvings were traditionally either "destroyed, allowed to rot, or sold to outsiders."[37] The funerary rites, especially, were designed not only to honor and commemorate the dead but also to ensure that the soul of the deceased would enter the world of the spirits/ancestors and provide continued protection for the living who remain on earth.

The ephemeral nature of *malagan* carvings, created for one-time-only usage, may seem (especially in Western thinking) to be at odds with their signally important role in the Melanesian culture of New Ireland. However, the birth and death of the images represents powerful acknowledgment and affirmation of cyclic forces—both earthly and spiritual.[38] These powerful figures and their specific iconography also represent highly complex symbols and designs signifying the social status and prestige of individuals or family groups. "From early infancy to revered old age, through inheritance, purchase, or occasionally, supernatural revelation, men and women gradually accumulate the rights, similar to Western copyrights, to commission specific named forms of *malagan* images and to perform the songs and rites associated with them."[39] The images are created by special carvers in accordance with the specific forms to which the commissioners are entitled. It is important to note, however, that

"the institution of *malagan* is not to be seen as a static complex of repetitive patterns, but as a living complex of changing syntheses that uses a limited but changing stock of motifs."[40]

There are many forms of *malagans*, including carved friezes, single figures, vertical poles with multiple figures, carved heads placed on figures made of other materials, and masks. Human and animal imagery are frequently combined often to represent spirit beings associated with specific clans or to convey particular stories.

> Every *malagan* has a story connected with it. Just as the production of a *malagan* is legitimized by the knowledge of that story, its authentic version can only be told by the owner of the rights to the *malagan* . . . Because most of the *malagans* now in collections around the world were gathered by people whose main interest was their aesthetic aspects . . . those works have lost their stories; that is to say, they have been artificially silenced. A major part of the iconographer's difficulty is this removal of the *malagans* from their context.[41]

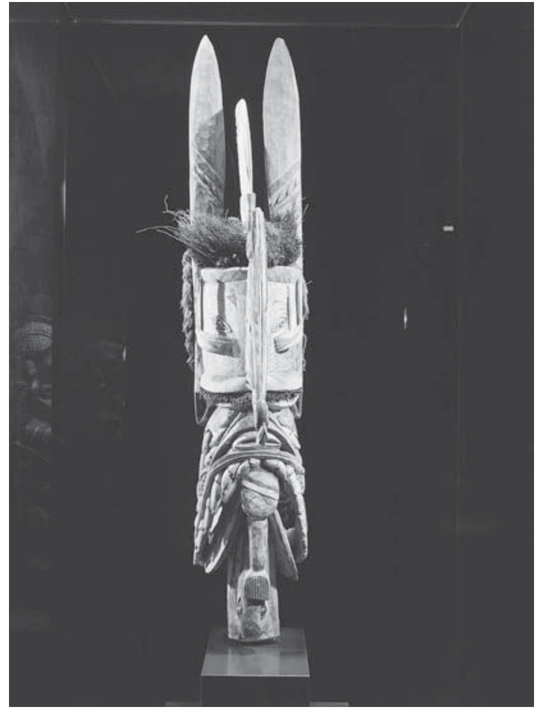


Figure 7.8 Malagan Image, 19th century, New Ireland. The Art Archive / Musée du Quai Branly Paris / Gianni Dagli Orti.

The example illustrated here dates to the 19th century and typifies the complex and often mysterious combination of forms typical of these works, the meaning of which is often undisclosed. "*Malanggan* figures command attention without speaking or touching and address without naming . . . each *malanggan* is a visual assemblage of parts that slot together like the pieces of a puzzle. The parts appear in the form of motifs that are strangely opaque, directing attention away from the subtle combinations that entice recognition."[42]

Maori Wood Carvings

The Maori of New Zealand are descended from Polynesian-speaking peoples who probably first arrived in New Zealand from the Marquesas and Society Islands by the 9th or 10th centuries CE. The arts produced by the Maori exhibit several distinctive style features—notably the use of intricate patterns often based on flowing curvilinear forms and a tendency toward decorative elaboration. These characteristic style features developed over several centuries of Maori art production in a variety of media and may be especially well seen in numerous examples of wood carving from the 19th century.

> Maori carving has been praised as the highest achievement of Maori art . . . From our knowledge of classical carving traditions, it was believed to be derived from the gods and to be safeguarded by careful training of the experts (*tohunga*) in carving and the related arts of house and canoe construction. For this reason, carving was surrounded by *tapu* restrictions . . . and preceded by rituals at every stage; for instance, incantations (*karakia*) were offered to the god Tane in the forest before the cutting down of trees for carving. Various stories were told about an ancestor, Rua, who started the art of carving after seeing images in the carved house of the sea god Tangaroa.[43]

Elaborately carved and painted wooden meeting houses (*wharemi* or *whare whakairo*) are of special importance in Maori customs and rituals. Used for events ranging from funeral rites to wedding ceremonies, initiations, and important community gatherings, these structures are generally rectangular with a shallow open entrance porch and an interior space supported by poles and beams. Carvings appear both on the interior and exterior, on pillars, vertical panels, gable boards, doorframes, lintels, thresholds, and roof finials.

The Te Hau Ki Turanga built for the Ngati Kaipoho tribe in the middle of the 19th century, is an excellent and well-preserved example[44] (see Plate 14). It is now located in the National Museum of New Zealand in Wellington. The design of the structure and carving are attributed to a named artist and chief, Raharuhi Rukupo (ca. 1790–1873), whose self-portrait appears in a large carving flanking the entrance on the interior of the structure. Rukupo is renowned as one of the greatest Maori carvers, and the Te Hau Ki Turanga house (completed with the assistance of a team of 18 other carvers) is often regarded as his masterpiece. The name of the house may be translated as "spirit" or "good tidings from Turanga" or "breath" or "vitality of Turanga" (one of the major Maori deities), and the building was constructed as a memorial to Rukupo's elder brother, Tamati Waka Mangere. The elaborate detail and complex iconography of the carvings are typical of Maori ornamented houses, especially as developed by the early to mid-19th century.

The rectangular house has a shallow entrance veranda and is replete with upright carved wooden panels (*poupou*), patterned panels woven from reeds (*tukutuku*), and painted designs on the rafters. It includes an ornamental threshold, carved and painted gable boards, and carved interior posts. Many of the carvings represent *tiki* figures of humanlike appearance (symbolizing ancestors, gods, or spirits), often combined with *manaia* (creatures combining human features with bird or reptilian elements). The painted rafters show the spiral, crescent, and *koru* patterns (bulbed stalklike stems), which abound in Maori decorative vocabulary. The interior represents "a horizontally and vertically ordered space conceptualized as a model of the cosmos and a metaphor of the history and embodiment of the ancestors of the group."[45] The house is visualized not only as a sacred enclosure symbolizing the sky outside and the earth inside, but also as a symbol of the body of the ancestor. The ridgepole represents the spine, the rafters are ribs, while arms, fingers, and head are also symbol-

ized by the carved gables and exterior finial. The overall effect of this richly decorated and colorful structure is extremely powerful, bespeaking its sacred significance.

A carved wooden lintel (or *pare*) from another Maori meeting house, dating to the late 1840s, again demonstrates the sacredness of the enclosed space as well as the open space (or *marae*) used as an assembly area in front of the structure (see Figure 7.9). The transition from exterior to interior space is understood to represent the passage between realms dominated by different deities. The exterior space is sometimes known as the domain of the war god Tumatauenga, whereas Rongo, the god of peace, presides over the interior space. This lintel illustrates the Maori story of the creation of the world, when the earth deity Papa (or Papatuanuku) and the sky deity Rangi (or Ranginui) were pushed apart from their perpetual embrace by their children, thus allowing light to enter the world. "This is not a story of gods creating the world but of the emergence of the world from the primeval parents."[46] The center figure is probably Tane, the god of the forests. The other children of the primeval couple became gods of the sea, the winds, agriculture, and war. Light and knowledge entering the world is symbolized by the spiraling forms surrounding the figures.

Carvings representing ancestors are commonly found in and on Maori meeting houses and on other types of architectural structures such as storehouses (or *patakas*), designed to store items such as food, tools, and weapons. These structures are generally set above ground on sturdy carved supports and may be enriched with carved gable finials (or *tekotekos*) as well (see Figure 7.10). The early 19th-century example illustrated depicts an ancestor of the Tuwharetoa people, placed there to represent the esteemed genealogy of the building's owner as well as to protect the building and its contents. "Ancestors, or *tupuna*, play a central role in Maori art and culture. They include all forebears, from the founding ancestors who arrived in canoes from eastern Polynesia and gave



Figure 7.9 Lintel from a Maori meeting house, wood, late 1840s. London: British Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 7.10 Gable finial, ancestor figure, wood, Maori, early 19th century. Berlin: Ethnologisches Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

rise to the different Maori groups, or *iwi*, that exist today to individuals who were born and died within living memory."[47] The gaping mouth of the figure indicates his strength and protective powers. The hands of the figure are depicted as "three birdlike claws, a reference to the mystical connections between man and birds that are found in New Zealand and throughout Polynesia."[48]

The elaborate surface ornamentation of much Maori art in general, and in figural sculpture especially, also reflects the importance of bodily embellishment in the form of tattooing in Maori culture.[49] Both men and women underwent this highly ritualized process, acquiring designs, often over a lifetime, representing specific clan symbols or marks indicating the passage of different stages of life or achievements. Maori tattoo (*moko*) is an art form still vibrantly practiced today.[50]

Easter Island Moai Figures

Rapa Nui—or Easter Island, so named by the Dutch explorer Jabob Roggeveen (1659–1729), the first recorded European visitor, who encountered the island on Easter Sunday 1722, is a remote location, representing the far reaches of the watery expanse of Polynesia, thousands of miles off the coast of Chile in South America, and substantially far away from any other island or land mass. Even so, the massive stone figures (or *moai*) of Easter Island are, arguably, among the most well-known and popularly reproduced images of Polynesian art (see Figure 7.11). These rows of figures and heads are found in several areas on the small (63 square mile) island. They have long gripped scholarly as well as popular attention because of their impressive size and mysterious ambiance. Hundreds of them exist, in various states of construction, preservation, and destruction. Clearly, the creation and erection of these huge, heavy, monolithic stone monuments was an activity that consumed the attention and energy of the island's inhabitants—presumably for extremely significant reasons—over a prolonged period of time. Most scholars agree in the assumption that these figures played an important role in the religious beliefs of the islanders and that they represent spirit or ancestral figures associated with different families or family groups among the island's early inhabitants.[51]



Figure 7.11 Easter Island Moai Figures of Ahu Tongariki, ca. 1000 CE. Joetex1 / Dreamstime.com.

With a few exceptions, all of the *moai* were carved from volcanic tufa stone, widely available in several quarries on the island. Unfinished examples still exist in several quarries. This evidence has assisted researchers in determining how the figures were produced and how they might have been moved (often great distances) from the quarries to the stone platforms (or *ahus*) on which they were set up. The statues were carved using stone tools and were probably moved on wooden rollers or sledges (or carefully pulled with ropes in an upright position) from their carving sites. The exact processes for rolling or walking the *moai* remain unclear. Researchers have experimented with replicating both modes—the rolling-on-logs methods being the most successful. In any case, the large scale and massive weight of the figures required supreme efforts on the part of doubtless hundreds of people involved with their creation and transportation.

Some of the tallest *moai* to be erected are between 30 and 40 feet in height. Many weigh between 70 and 80 tons. The largest example (unfinished and left in its quarry location) is estimated to have been intended to be close to 70 feet tall and weigh close to 300 tons. Although the *moai* are often referred to as the Easter Island heads, their general appearance is of enlarged, oversize, angular heads on thick, legless torsos with carved inset arms placed in various positions close to the body. The faces have heavy brows, elongated noses with curling nostrils, thin, protruding lips, and big eye sockets designed to hold large eyes of coral and black obsidian. It is believed that the figures were originally painted with mineral pigments, traces of which remain on some examples. Many of the figures have

topknots (or *pukaos*), which look like cylindrical hats. *Pukaos* were often carved separately and added to the figures later. The figures were generally arranged in groups (of upwards of 15) aligned along the *ahu* platform. With few exceptions, the *moai* look inward toward the land rather than outward to the ocean.

When the first Europeans reached Easter Island in the early 18th century, most of the *moai* were still standing. But later 18th-century visitors, such as Captain Cook, reported that many of the *moai* had been neglected or toppled from their ceremonial platforms. Some appeared to have been deliberately decapitated. The unfinished examples in the quarries also indicate that the production of *moai* and the regard in which they were held had long ceased by this time. Many believe that the *moai* were constructed primarily between about 1000 and 1500 CE, although earlier dates have been proposed as well.

Various dates have also been proposed for the first migration of people to Easter Island. Many scholars believe that the first people to reach Easter Island came from the Marquesas Islands of Polynesia sometime in the early centuries CE (perhaps in the fifth or sixth century CE, contemporary with the initial settlement of the Hawaiian Islands). Other researchers, notably the Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl (1914–2002), have speculated and attempted to prove by his famous 1947 expedition on his wooden raft, *Kon-Tiki*, that the early inhabitants of Easter Island arrived from the Peruvian coast.[52] Although varying theories of the origins of the Easter Islanders remain avidly discussed, it does seem clear that this remote volcanic island, once it was populated by humans, had diminishing natural resources to support the growing population. Originally forested with several species of trees (especially palms), it appears that the island was eventually deforested by the inhabitants, who used the trees to build dwellings, boats, and (as is speculated) sledges or rollers for the process of moving and erecting the large *moai* sculptures. Diminishing resources and shortages of food ultimately, as many believe, resulted in fierce competition and internal warfare among the people. The attacks on and toppling of the *moai* may have been a result of this, as the *moai* represented ancestral figures of powerful and battling clans.

Much of the history and culture of Easter Island remains enigmatic. The population was severely decimated in the 19th century by the incursion of Peruvian slave raiders who killed or abducted over half of the remaining people. Diseases were also brought to the island by Westerners in the 19th century, and, by the late 19th century only slightly more than 100 people were living there.

The standing *moai* of Easter Island today largely represent careful restorations by various teams of researchers. The 15 *moai* of Ahu Tongariki, illustrated in Figure 7.11, were just recently re-erected in the 1990s. These figures had previously been toppled, and the *ahu* (platform) had been swept inland by a tsunami earlier in the 20th century.

Although much scholarly attention has been devoted to Easter Island, many questions still remain about the dramatic history of the island and the changing beliefs and religious practices of the people. Ancestral worship, represented by

the *moai* figures, appears to have been replaced or supplemented by the 17th or 18th century with other practices revolving around worship of the birdman (*tangata manu*), the cult of which dominated the later history of the island. It is wise also to remember that the *moai,* although perhaps the most visibly impressive examples of Easter Island art, take their position within a complex culture in which other forms of art were also produced. Smaller statuary, abundant petroglyphs, and wooden tablets inscribed with a distinctive and largely undeciphered hieroglyphic script system known as *rongorongo* are all among the important visual survivals from this remote region of the world.[53]

NOTES

1. Albert Moore, *Arts in the Religions of the Pacific* (London: Cassell, 1995), 2–3.
2. Allen Wardwell, *Island Ancestors: Oceanic Art from the Masco Collection* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 7.
3. Wardwell, 7.
4. Wardwell, 7.
5. Moore, 5.
6. Moore, 22.
7. William Rubin, *"Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, vol. 1 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 332.
8. Wardwell, 8.
9. Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 145, 48.
10. Moore, 34.
11. Moore, 40.
12. Luke Taylor, *Seeing the Inside: Bark Painting in Western Arnheim Land* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
13. Luke Taylor, "Seeing the 'Inside:' Kunwinjku Paintings and the Symbol of the Divided Body," in *Animals into Art,* ed. Howard Morphy (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 371–98.
14. Wally Caruana, *Aboriginal Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 27.
15. Louis Allen, *Time Before Morning: Art and Myth of the Australian Aborigines* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), especially 140–44, and Peter Carroll, "Mimi from Western Arnheim Land," in *Form in Indigenous Art: Schematisation in the Art of Aboriginal Australia and Prehistoric Europe,* ed. Peter Ucko (Canberra, Australia: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 119–30.
16. Louis Allen, *Australian Aboriginal Art: Arnheim Land* (Chicago, IL: Field Museum Press, 1972), 3.
17. Eric Kjellgren, *Oceania: Art of the Pacific Islands in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 126.
18. Kjellgren, 126.
19. Robert Welsch, Virginia-Lee Webb, and Sebastian Haraha, *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art and Society in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, Hood Museum of Art, 2006).
20. Adrianne Kaeppler, *The Pacific Arts of Polynesia and Micronesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.
21. John Elder, *Art of Polynesia* (Honolulu, HI: Hemmeter, 1990), 14.

22. Kaeppler, 5.
23. Elder, 26–27.
24. Many studies have been devoted to Gauguin's interest in Polynesia and the impact of this on his art. See, for example, Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Gauguin's Early Tahitian Idols," *The Art Bulletin* 60, no. 2 (1978): 331–41, and Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993) for additional bibliography.
25. See Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art,* and Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
26. Peter Sutton, ed., *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* (New York: George Braziller, 1988); Fred Myers, "Representing Culture: The Production of Discourse(s) for Aboriginal Acrylic Painting," *Cultural Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (1991): 26–62; and Fred Myers, "Re/Writing the Primitive: Art Criticism and the Circulation of Aboriginal Painting," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Views from the Outside: A Centennial Commemoration of Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968),* ed. Irving Lavin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 65–84.
27. Wardwell, 8.
28. Wardwell, 9.
29. Miriam Clavir, "Reflections on Changes in Museums and the Conversation of Collections from Indigenous Peoples," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 35, no. 2 (1996): 99–107; Michelle Maunder, "The Conservation of Sacred Objects," in *Godly Things: Museums, Objects and Religion,* ed. Crispin Paine (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 197–208.
30. Wardwell, 9.
31. J. Halley Cox and William Davenport, *Hawaiian Sculpture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.)
32. Wardwell, 114.
33. Wardwell, 114.
34. Kjellgren, 159.
35. Michael Gunn, "The Transfer of Malagan Ownership on Tabar," in *Assemblage of Spirits: Idea and Image in New Ireland,* ed. Louise Lincoln (New York: George Braziller, 1987), 74–83.
36. Kjellgren, 161.
37. Kjellgren, 161.
38. Susanne Küchler, *Malanggan: Art, Memory, and Sacrifice* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
39. Kjellgren, 159.
40. Peter Heintze, "On Trying to Understand Some Malagans," in *Assemblage of Spirits: Idea and Image in New Ireland,* ed. Louise Lincoln (New York: George Braziller, 1987), 42.
41. Heintze, 42.
42. Küchler, 116.
43. Moore, 169–71.
44. Terence Barrow, *A Guide to the Maori Meeting House Te Hau-Ki-Turanga* (Wellington, New Zealand: National Museum, 1976).
45. Kaeppler, 63.
46. Moore, 162.

47. Kjellgren, 309.
48. Wardwell, 202.
49. David Simmons, *Ta Moko: The Art of Maori Tattoo* (Auckland, New Zealand: Reed, 1986).
50. Hans Neleman, *Moko–Maori Tattoo* (Zurich, Switzerland: Edition Stemmle, 1999).
51. An excellent recent study of Easter Island is Jo Anne Van Tilburg, *Easter Island: Archaeology, Ecology, and Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).
52. Thor Heyerdahl, *Easter Island: The Mystery Solved* (New York: Random House, 1989); Thor Heyerdahl, *The Kon-Tiki Expedition* (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1950); and Thor Heyerdahl and Christopher Ralling, *Kon-Tiki Man: An Illustrated Biography of Thor Heyerdahl* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991).
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Indigenous Religions of Africa

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

As with several other chapters in this study that purport to cover vast world regions populated, in the past and at present, by many different cultural groups, similar challenges are more than posed by the materials to be considered here. The African continent represents an enormous geographic area, second only in size to Asia, with an extremely lengthy history as well as signally important prehistory. Evidences of some of the very first human activity on earth have been traced to Africa, and many believe that humans first evolved in Africa millions of years ago. Some of the world's earliest art—in the form of charcoal drawings of animals on stone—has been found in Africa, from approximately the same time as, or even earlier than, some of the most ancient Paleolithic examples in Europe. From these remote beginnings, the history of human habitation in Africa can be traced through many subsequent millennia, representing an enormous variety of different cultures spread across the vast geographic expanse. At present, the African continent is composed of over 50 different countries (representing modern political boundaries) in which hundreds of different languages are spoken by many distinct cultural and ethnic groups.

Any attempt to discuss the religious arts of Africa is thus very much challenged, if not quite daunted by, the vastness and diversity of the material to be covered. Scholars have faced these challenges in a number of different ways. Many specialists in African art and religion have devoted their attention to highly detailed studies of specific cultural groups or regions or time periods. Some of these scholars have focused on archaeological materials—or on

anthropological studies of the current traditions represented by various cultural groups in Africa—or have combined the archaeological and anthropological approaches to identify and discuss the historical traditions represented in past and present African regions. A vast amount of specialized bibliography of this nature exists.

Other scholars have taken a more comprehensive approach and have produced extremely impressive studies covering the history and religions of the African continent as a whole.[1] This continentally comprehensive approach well serves to point out the extremely complex and lengthy history of Africa from prehistory to the present day and, for example, critically reminds readers that the arts and religious practices of civilizations such as that of ancient Egypt (which flourished in northeastern Africa from approximately the third millennium BCE to first century CE—see chapter 3) may or should appropriately be included in any discussion of the African continent as a whole, in spite of the fact that ancient Egypt is often regarded as a separate field of study—the venue of Egyptologists rather than Africanists.[2]

Comprehensive coverage of the religious arts of the African continent as a whole will also necessarily include and acknowledge the influence and importance, especially, of the religions of Christianity (see chapter 10) and Islam (see chapter 11) in the formation and development of African religious art forms in numerous regions of the continent. While fully acknowledging the importance and influence of these imported religions, other scholars of African religious art have chosen to focus on the native and indigenous traditions, attempting to restrict their discussion to regions, cultures, and peoples in Africa who—in various manners and with varying degrees of success—appear to have maintained ancient traditions and to have avoided, or fended off, influences from nonnative and colonizing peoples.

Many such discussions of the traditional religious arts of Africa thus exclude, for example, not only ancient Egyptian civilization, but also the distinctive Christian art styles of Ethiopia, as well as the important examples of Islamic art and architecture found in many African regions. These studies tend to focus on particular regions or cultures in Africa that appear to have, in spite of both highly disastrous as well as profitable contact with European, American, and Asian traders and colonizers, maintained some degree of cultural autonomy. Many studies of African art and religion thus separate and segment Africa into a series of regions in which traditional religions were and continue to be practiced, relatively unaffected by outside influences, and regions in which outside influences have greatly affected the art and religious forms.

Terminology: Issues and Challenges

The study and discussion of the religions and arts of Africa seems to have always been exceptionally fraught by terminological issues.[3] A great deal of continued contention persists in current scholarship to the present day about

the appropriate usage of specific terms to describe African religious art. At every turn, it appears that even terms such as "art" and "religion" when used to describe African religious arts may be problematic, let alone terms such as "primitive," "primal," "tribal," "traditional," "native," and "indigenous."[4] "What passes as African art and the terms employed to describe it whether by museums, scholars, collectors, etc., are as revealing about the latter as they are about the art itself."[5] It is always extremely wise to be highly attentive to any cultural biases implied in the usage of specific descriptive terminology, no matter the field of study.[6] Approaches to the study of African art reveal these challenges extremely well and demonstrate the many pitfalls involved with imposed classification systems, methodologies, and descriptive labels.[7]

In particular, the traditional use of the term "primitive" to describe African art has been hotly debated for many decades now as reflective of Eurocentric implied value judgments about the relative skill, sophistication, intellectual/philosophical content, or overall importance of African arts within the hierarchy of the traditionally Western art forms of large-scale architecture, sculpture, and painting.[8] Indeed, the response to the primitive arts of Africa on the part of Western European artists of the early 20th century and the role of these arts in the formation of major modern Western art styles such as Cubism has long been the topic of much lively discussion as well.[9]

Although many books about primitive art (including African, Oceanic, and American Indian arts) have been published well into the late 20th century, and academic courses, museums, and exhibitions have used the term "primitive" for many years as well, semipreferred terminological alternatives at present include "native," "tribal," "traditional," and "indigenous," in spite of copious objections to these terms as well. The designation "tribal" has been criticized as representing "a hegemonic Western construction rooted in the colonial and neocolonial epoch,"[10] although many studies continue to be published on African tribal arts.[11] Similarly, the use of the term "traditional" has been analytically critiqued also as reflective of socially and politically manipulative Western-created and Western-imposed concepts.[12] Because the term "traditional" can imply static, unchanging, and noninnovative, its use has been seen as representing "an attempt by Europeans and Americans to 'freeze-dry' all that they consider to be 'authentic' and 'ideal' in African culture. [The term] is associated in many Westerners' minds with notions of authenticity and purity, implying that it could only include art forms produced and used by African villagers around the end of the nineteenth century."[13]

Many of the terms used to describe specific types of African art are also highly problematic. Some of these terms reflect, at best, Western attempts to categorize works of art using vocabulary that strives to most accurately capture the (often untranslatable) variety of African language terms used for particular types of art works. At worst, however, some of the terminology used to describe specific types of African art reflects not only grave misunderstandings about the function of these art works but also the deliberate usage of terms that have

pejorative or negative connotations. Terms such as "fetish" have, for example, been rather indiscriminately applied to numerous works of African art whose original functions were of widely ranging purposes, and terms such as "dolls" have been used to describe works of art that, far from being mere playthings, have extremely serious cultural significance. Many scholars have made very useful progress during the past several decades in encouraging the use of alternate terminology for describing specific types of African art objects, and this process continues to provide lively debate today.

Similarly, "the study of African religions is no less controversial than the study of African art."[14] Some scholars have used the term "primal" to describe the non-Western-influenced religions of Africa, characterizing these belief systems as representative of ancient and deep-rooted responses of humankind to fundamental questions about life, death, and the supernatural—not in a primitive (unsophisticated, nonintellectual) fashion but in a manner that places these beliefs firmly within the world's oldest and most fundamental religious traditions.[15] Even so, as has been repeatedly pointed out, the use of Western terms such as *holy, sacred, supernatural, mystical,* and so on, "is hampered by the problems of translation from African languages" in which many different words are used to define these concepts in ways that include multiple and nuanced meanings often quite lost or misrepresented in Western translation.[16] Many significant studies have been produced exploring these complex issues.[17]

This chapter is carefully titled "Indigenous Religions of Africa." The hope and intention is to thus avoid *at least some of* the terminological contention by focusing primary attention on the religious arts of Africa that appear to best represent and present the distinctive and unique qualities of traditional African religious arts as viewed and used within the contexts of their original creation and purpose.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

As is clear from the preceding discussion, any attempt to neatly summarize the fundamental beliefs and key practices associated with the multitude of traditional African cultures (past and present) runs the severe risks of not only over-generalization but serious terminological misrepresentation. For example, the use of terms such as "monotheism," "polytheism," and "animism" may all be seen as inadequate constructions that tend to confuse the issues rather than explicate. The many cultural groups of Africa all have religious beliefs and practices that are unique to their societies, as well as different vocabulary to describe these beliefs and practices. The degree to which traditions have been affected by or modified in response to historical or ongoing and contemporary influences varies greatly, as well as the forms that traditional African religion has taken on in various areas of the world outside the African continent.

Nevertheless, some common themes may be noted. Most traditional African religions ascribe the creation of the world to an all-powerful divinity. This

supreme being (male, female, or both) has many different names but is understood to be the ultimate agency through which the world and its human and animal inhabitants came into being.

> Although in myths the Supreme Being is spoken of in a personal manner, as if he were a man with a body, and often with a wife and family, yet many African sayings and proverbs speak of God in an abstract and philosophical fashion. God is the abstract idea, the cause. He is also a personal deity, generally benevolent, who cares for men and does not strike them with terror. Further, he is an indwelling power, which sustains and animates all things. God knows everything, he sees all, he can do whatever he wishes. . . . He is indescribable, the only reality.[18]

A belief in a sole divine force—omnipotent, indescribable, and all powerful—is generally termed *monotheism*. But, in addition to the supreme creator deity, many traditional African religions recognize and venerate numerous other deities or spirits, as facets, aspects, or reflections of divinity. These figures/deities/spirits "may be called personifications of natural forces and other glorified heroes of the past; some are both."[19]

A belief in multiple deities is generally termed *polytheism*. These spirits or deities (both male and female) may be associated with storms, rain, wind, lightning, water, the earth, rocks, mountains, human concerns of birth, death, and illness, and activities such as hunting and agriculture. On the other hand, the belief that deities or spirits associated with natural forces, landscape elements, or human activities are present to actively guide these events, or that these forces are manifested in natural phenomena, is generally termed *animism*.

None of these terms seem truly applicable—across the board—to describe the variety of traditional African religious beliefs and practices. Monotheistic faith systems such as Christianity and Islam have been widely adopted by many peoples in Africa who also continue to practice older, or syncretized, traditions with remarkable degrees of flexibility in the maintenance as well as development of worship forms.

Thus, the veneration of and communication with deities and spirits takes on many different forms in Africa. Offerings of food and drink, animal sacrifices, and libations may be placed in traditional African shrines and sanctuaries. Dances and masking ceremonies are regularly performed, with singing, chanting, prayers, and musical accompaniment.

Much knowledge of traditional African beliefs is based on and promulgated via oral traditions. Of course, many oral traditions have been committed to writing, but traditional African religions are not text or scripture-based. Sacred texts, representing divine revelations (akin to the Bible or Qur'an) do not play a part in traditional African religion. Memory, as well as secrecy, are critical elements in African traditional religions.[20] Commemoration of ancestors, the maintenance and development of traditional ceremonies for communication with the spirit world, and the importance of guarding these powerful practices

via initiatory rites and memberships achieved in secret societies are all shared customs. Elders and priests with special knowledge or power often manage and control the rituals. Much recent scholarship has been devoted to the important roles of women in these traditions as well.[21] Practices of divination are widespread and varied,[22] as well as various forms of alchemy, spell-casting, and enchantment.[23]

These general features are common to many traditional African religious practices, although details vary widely through different regions and cultural groups. Various forms of art are employed in religious practices, again, with important regional and cultural variations. It is wise to be mindful of the specific practices of diverse cultures in any generalizations about African religion and religious art.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

The religious arts of Africa comprise a great many media including painting, sculpture, architecture, textiles, ceramics, metalwork, and so on. It is an unfortunate reality that many of the world's museums house or display their collections of African art in settings that are not wholly conducive to viewing and understanding these arts in their original contexts.[24] In most museum collections, works of African art are often separated from other chronologically or thematically grouped materials and displayed in special galleries devoted to non-Western art. The objects grouped together in the African art galleries are likely to represent a great diversity of materials and original purposes, ranging widely from the religious to the secular. Objects designed for domestic use, such as carved furniture, are displayed alongside works of art of grand courtly regalia. These touch elbows with dramatic and striking works produced for religious and ceremonial usage, such as masks and power figures, never designed to be so displayed and studied. This mixture of collected pieces of African art is often quite mystifying for viewers and may lead to the impression that all African art is somehow religious or mystical in some primal form.

Works of traditional African religious art (such as masks, ancestor figures, and carved or painted images of other spirits) were never intended to be collected or displayed in museums, but rather were designed to be used in vibrant performances and ceremonies involving music and dance and active engagement on the part of multiple participants (see Figure 8.1).

> Most works of art were viewed very differently in their original context from the way they were or are seen in Western museums. In Africa some figures were kept in dark shrines, only visible to a few persons, while others were covered with cloth, accouterments, offerings, and surrounded by music and dancing. Such objects . . . lose meaning by being made accessible to the visual culture of the West.[25]

However, the extraction of any work of art from its original context poses serious challenges to scholars in all fields. The display of any religious objects



Figure 8.1 Dogon *dama* ceremony, Bandiagara Hills, Mali. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

as cultural artifacts or art works divorces them from their original context—whether it be Western medieval reliquaries containing saints' bones, or African masks and spirit figures, or Byzantine icons, or images of the Buddha taken from Asian temples, or ancient Greek sculptures removed from their original settings. Many complex issues are certainly involved with the collection and display of religious art works.[26] One could argue that all religious art is ultimately designed to inspire viewer participation and that one cannot understand a religion without participating in it or without seeing the associated art in its original context. Nevertheless, sincere attempts to understand the religion and art of any culture will understand that "meaning is continually emergent, elusive, and constructed from available evidence, namely oral and written literature, the discourse of local specialists, the close examination of the historical and cultural milieu of the work, its morphology, imagery, uses, and its relationship to other arts in performance contexts."[27]

Masks and Masking Performances

Among the many forms of African religious art, masks are doubtless the most well known and are certainly well familiar to Western audiences because of their long history of collection and display in various sorts of museums. Indeed, it could be said that "masks have come to be emblematic of African culture in general."[28] Thousands of examples of masks exist, representing a great variety of types and functions, created from a multitude of different materials, such as wood, clay, metal, fabric, beads, leaves, feathers, animal skins, horns, shells, and so on. Although many scholars believe that the use of masks in ritual ceremonies can be traced back to prehistoric times in Africa, and travelers' reports from the Western medieval and Renaissance periods include descriptions of masks and masking performances, the majority of African masks found in public and private collections today primarily date to the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. This is largely due to the perishable nature of the materials often used for their creation, as well as their active ceremonial use. Masks, of ancient styles as well as innovative and evolving forms, continue to be produced and used in traditional African religious contexts today. The significance of understanding masks within the contexts of their original use and function simply cannot be overemphasized.

> We should recall that the objects that sometimes seem to lie so lifelessly in their museum display cases were conceived for an entirely different setting and atmosphere. . . . Accompanied by music and song, gestures and rhythms were determined by the type and purpose of the masquerade. Some masks were intended to shock or horrify, others to astonish or to make audiences laugh. Even the most mystifying of masks . . . had a meaning or a message to convey.[29]

It is also critical to be aware that "Many masks now in museums and private collections have been, as it were, mutilated, only the aesthetically appealing face or head portion having been saved."[30] Many masks originally included elements that are now missing, such as fabric, fiber, and feathers. Masks must be understood as having functioned as components in entire costumes of varying degrees of elaboration, accompanied by other ritual objects held by the masker, as visual elements in multisensory performances involving music, dance, gesture, and motion.

Many excellent studies of African dances and ceremonies have been produced that well serve to remind viewers of the great challenges involved with seeing inert objects (masks, costumes, and other accessories) that once functioned in vibrant motion-filled events. Bodily attitudes, stances, poses, gestures, movements of standing, sitting, kneeling, crouching, turning, spinning, and stamping, and elements of grace, balance, smoothness, vibration, pace, and tempo all provided the original essential components now lacking in museum display contexts.[31] Additionally, it should be noted that not all African dances and ceremonies involve the use of masks.[32]

In ordinary Western usage, the terms "mask," "masquerade," and "masking" often have primary connotations of playfulness, entertainment, and amusement. Masks are often considered simply as funny faces donned for festive occasions or nonserious events. In African cultures, as well as in the plethora of other world cultures in which masks are used in social and religious rituals, masks often function in ways that far exceed the concepts of entertainment or purely theatrical spectacle.[33] Even so, attempts to draw distinctions between the fun and serious use of masks are doubtless less useful than the recognition that "in reality, any masked performance has a complex of purposes, and even the most 'serious' are not without their humorous, entertaining aspects. . . . Masking performances can without discrepancy be both serious ritual and captivating entertainment."[34] Masks are used in a great variety of social contexts, and "generally speaking, it is doubtful whether the blanket terms 'religious' and 'secular' do justice to the actual meaning of many masquerades."[35] Masks can serve as extremely powerful vehicles for spiritual and psychological transformation, as means to communicate directly with the supernatural—spirits of the ancestors, gods, and nature. Masks are used during rites of passage, such as births, funerals, coming of age, and marriage ceremonies; they feature in rituals associated with initiation and membership in secret societies that represent political and religious power and authority; they are also used as hunting disguises and in rituals to promote the success of hunting and agricultural activities.

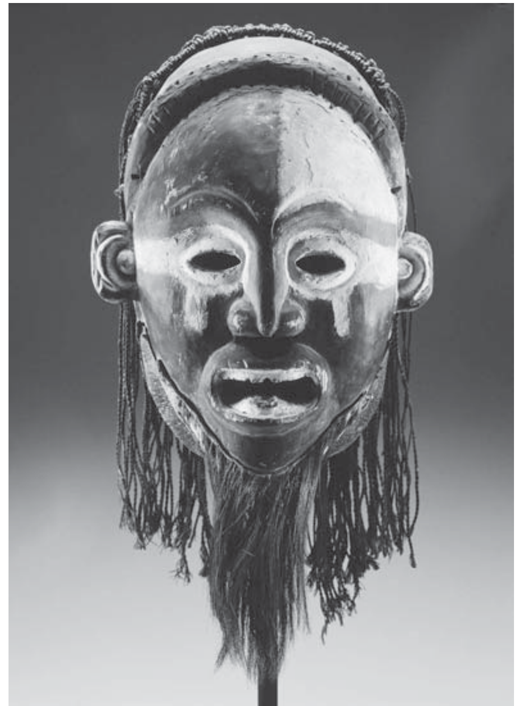


Figure 8.2 Vili face mask, 19th century, wood, fiber, leopard skin, hair, Democratic Republic of Congo. Berlin: Ethnologisches Museum. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

African masks represent an enormous variety of forms, but some basic types can be identified.[36] These include face masks (which cover the front of the wearer's face either fully or partially) (see Figure 8.2), helmet masks (which fit over the wearer's entire head) (see Plate 15), helmet crests (worn like caps on the top of heads) (see Figure 8.3), forehead masks or cap crests (perched on the wearer's forehead), headdress masks (worn on the very top of the head) (see Figure 8.7), and shoulder masks (large heavy masks that rest on the shoulders) (see Figure 8.4). Some masks are extremely tall or multistoried; others have long horizontal extensions or appendages; some masks are designed to be worn by several people simultaneously. Some masks are not worn on the face or head but rather as pendants or strapped elsewhere on the body. Other masks are held in the hands and manipulated in various ceremonial



Figure 8.3 Edo crest mask, 18th century, metal, Nigeria. Washington, DC: National Museum of African Art. Jerry L. Thompson / Art Resource, NY.

actions, and painted depictions of masks appear in architectural shrine/sanctuary contexts as well. The arts of face and body painting, as well as tattooing and scarification, are closely related to the use and purposes of masks also.[37]

The images and themes of African masks also vary greatly depending on their position, meaning, and function. Some masks have recognizable human features; others have highly abstract designs based on human faces; many show animals (antelopes, leopards, elephants, fish, and birds); other are zoomorphic combinations of animal forms; and others show zooanthropomorphic combinations of human and animal features. Some masks are female and others are male. While masking performances are traditionally dominated by men (with some important exceptions),[38] it is important to note that many "masking societies identify women as, if not always the inventors, then the original familiars of the entities portrayed in masking."[39] Although masks are among the most familiar and ubiquitous forms of African art, and art historians and collectors have identified many different formats, regional styles, and, in some cases, the names of the artists responsible for creating the masks, awareness of the contextual usage of masks contributes essentially to understanding their significant and complex roles in African society and religious practices.

Shrines, Sanctuaries, and Power Figures

Needless to say, the creation of sacred space is as signally important in traditional African religious practices as in all faith traditions. Space can become sacred by virtue of architectural enclosure or by other means. Dances and rituals can render a space sacred through the power of the actions that take place there. Sacred space does not always require architectural construction of dedicated religious structures within which rituals (either closed to the general public or more widely attended) are enacted. African traditional religious practices reflect this diversity as well.

The creation of dedicated sacred spaces—in the form of shrines and sanctuaries—is common to many traditional African religions. Naturally, these forms of architecture are always influenced by the available building materi-

als, whether it be stone, wood, brick, clay, soil, grass, palm, bamboo, and so on. It might be said that, in general, the enclosed sacred spaces of traditional African religions are designed to house powerful objects that provide a focal point for religious ceremonies of a variety of sorts, as is common in many of the world's religions.



Figure 8.4 Baga shoulder mask, wood, Guinea. Newark, New Jersey: The Newark Museum / Art Resource, NY.

Both religious and domestic buildings in Africa are often of cylindrical hut format (meaning that they are single-celled interior spaces) and have conical roofs (see Figure 8.5). Rectangular and square-planned buildings are also common, often in the form of houses consisting of several structures with related functions arranged around a central courtyard. Buildings, such as temples, shrines, and cult houses, may be dedicated to specific spirits or deities and contain sculptures representing the deity as well as worshiping figures (see Figure 8.6). Shrines for housing the relics of ancestral spirits are common, as well as shrines to deities and spirits whose propitious influence on particular aspects of human life may be sought. Meeting houses set aside for members of secret societies may contain altars and relics and serve to house ritual objects specifically associated with the group of initiates. Many traditional African religious structures are enriched with carved and painted interior and exterior decoration often in the form of powerful symbols that bespeak the importance of the structure and also serve to guard its contents. Power figures contained within these structures may be masks, sculptures of deities and worshipers, ancestral relics, and objects devoted to specific practices of divination.

EXAMPLES

Bamana Chi Wara Headdress Mask

The Bamana (or Bambara) kingdom was established in Mali during the 17th century, and the Bamana people remain the largest ethnic group in the region. Among the best known and highly collected of their many forms of art, the wooden headdresses of the Chi Wara (Tji Wara or Tyi Wara) society have long been admired for their graceful elegance and stylized forms (see Figure 8.7) Most examples of Chi Wara headdresses represent the curved body



Figure 8.5 Keita Ancestral Shrine, Kaba Kangaba, Mali. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 8.6 Yoruba Shango Shrine, Nigeria. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

of an antelope with tall horns, large ears, and a protruding notched mane. There are a number of regional variations and formats. Some Chi Wara headdresses are tall and vertical with soaring horns (as in the example illustrated in Figure 8.7) while others are of more horizontal format with the antelope's horns projecting over its back; other examples combine additional animal forms and features. In some examples, the antelope, or other animals, are clearly recognizable; other variations are more abstract. Different degrees of additional elaboration are also seen; carved and incised patterns such as triangles, circles, and zigzags enrich many examples.



Figure 8.7 Bamana Chi Wara headdress mask, wood, fiber, shell, metal, Mali. Washington, DC: National Museum of African Art. Aldo Tutino / Art Resource, NY.

Traditionally, the Bamana people have been farmers, challenged by the fact that the dry savanna region in which they live is characterized by low quality soil and a restricted growing season. "To work this land and make it yield has always required tremendous effort. For the Bamana however, farming is not only a necessity, but the noblest of professions in life."[40] The Chi Wara headdresses are connected with Bamana farming practices, being used in ritual dances and ceremonies designed to ensure agricultural fertility and to celebrate human prowess with tilling the earth. Members of the Chi Wara society traditionally wear these distinctive headdresses in ceremonies involving displays of skill with tilling the earth under the guidance and encouragement of the watchful spirits. Both male and female Chi Wara masks are paired in these ceremonies, again emphasizing the desire for fertility and sustaining growth.

According to traditional Bamana legends, "the primordial being Tyi Wara was the first farmer, a wild beast who taught mankind how to cultivate the fields."[41] Field research among the Bamana peoples in the mid- to late 20th century has demonstrated, however, that

> the number of people who know the details of this legend today are small. . . . Many are aware that the Tyi Wara has something to do with agriculture, but in some areas people no longer even know this. If you go into a Bamana village today and ask if they have a Tyi Wara among them, they will most probably answer in the affirmative. What they have in mind is . . . an *excellent farmer*.[42]

The importance of field research and contextual studies is well demonstrated yet again here. Chi Wara masks continue to be produced and used by many Bamana peoples, as well as understood in new ways. "No doubt the common practice of calling an excellent farmer Tyi Wara had its origins in people being compared to the supernatural personality who was the best farmer the earth had ever seen."[43] Even so, the associations of Chi Wara headdresses, dances, and rituals with a specific primordial agricultural deity need to be seen within the ongoing and vibrantly shifting associations of traditional African religious art forms. Many Bamana peoples have converted to Islam, and, although traditional Chi Wara dances may still be performed today, these practices have taken on different connotations and meanings.

In point of fact, the Chi Wara headdresses, so prized by Western collectors for their "semi-naturalistic or abstract manner with beautiful rhythmic flowing lines, angles and spaces" represent a relatively modern form of mask headdress developed by the Bamana people in the early years of the 20th century.[44] Far from being examples of ancient African art, reflective of long-standing and primal traditions, the Chi Wara headdresses serve to well reflect the vibrancy and ongoing innovations in African art. Their appeal to Western tastes in the early to mid-20th century ("Europeans saw the headdresses and desired to have them") resulted in the purchase, as well as thefts—often orchestrated by middlemen—of these objects, not to mention the production of new examples of these objects for the collecting and tourist trade.[45]

Kongo *Nkisi Nkondi* Figure

Widely produced by the Bakongo peoples of central Africa during the late 19th and early 20th century (and to some extent to the present day at well), figures known as *nkisi* (plural: *minkisi*) are among the most well-known and perhaps also most dramatic examples of African religious arts (see Plate 16). Removed from their original contexts and displayed in museums, these figures may appear extremely startling and difficult to understand. Often described as magical figures or fetishes, the term *nkisi* is fundamentally untranslatable. Perhaps the best equivalent (if the term needs to be translated at all) is "power figure."

M*inkisi* figures exist in a variety of forms. The late 19th-century example illustrated in Plate 16 is a *nkisi nkondi* or hunter figure, in the form of a standing male. The core wooden figure bristles with metal blades and nails, which have been driven in on all sides, partially obscuring all of the figure apart from the face. "M*inkisi* as found today in numerous museums are no more than parts of the material apparatus necessary for the performance of rituals in pursuit of particular goals."[46] In the case of *nkondi* ("hunter") figures, it is traditionally said that their major purpose "was to identify and hunt down unknown wrongdoers, such as thieves and those who were believed to have caused sickness and

death among their neighbors by occult means."[47] Ritual use of these figures was undertaken by qualified experts (*nganga*) who, on behalf of an individual or community, empowered the figures with the addition of mineral, vegetable, and animal materials known as medicines or *bilongo* (in this case partially sealed in a packet on the figure's head), and drove one or more nails or blades into the figure, while making incantations to direct the figure to its task. *Minkisi* figures "could be used to deflect sorcerous intent, protect against misfortune and illness, regulate disputes, create treaties or swear oaths."[48] Nails driven into these figures may thus represent oaths taken under the auspices of these powerful figures or perhaps also offerings of thanks for tasks completed by the *minkisi* rituals. Much scholarship has been devoted to *minkisi* figures—their styles, makers, and uses—reflecting their continued fascination and power.[49]

Ashanti *Akua Ma* Figurines

Produced in great numbers by the Ashanti (Asante) and other west African cultural groups, *akua ma* (or *akua 'mma*) figurines are often described by the misleading term "dolls" (see Figure 8.8). While the use of this term is not wholly inaccurate, these objects were not intended as toys or playthings but rather as powerful vehicles to promote female fertility. They are generally carved of wood and typically have enlarged, round, flat heads, stylized facial features of long straight noses and prominent eyebrows, long necks, and small bodies (with or without horizontally projecting arms.)



Figure 8.8 Ashanti *Akua Ma* figurines, wood, Ghana. The Art Archive / Paris: Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens / Gianni Dagli Orti.

Akua ma figurines were created to be cared for, and carried by, women hoping to have children (and thus fulfill their primary social role of childbearing). The carved figures, after having been consecrated at a shrine, were customarily carried by young women, tucked into their garments on their backs, in the fashion real babies are often carried. The practice continues today. "Thought to have the power to make women conceive [they] are carried around and treated like a real child by the Asante women. After use, they are placed in a domestic shrine."[50] *Akua ma* means "Akua's children" in reference to the Ashanti legend of a woman named Akua who was "the first woman to own and care



Figure 8.9 Kota *Mbulu-Ngulu* figure, metal and wood, Gabon. The Art Archive / Paris: Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens / Gianni Dagli Orti.

for a consecrated human figure on instruction from a priest. Barren, and mocked for carrying a surrogate baby made of wood, Akua is said to have gotten pregnant nevertheless, eventually giving birth to a healthy baby girl. Female children are preferred among the matrilineal Akan, and *akua ma* are almost always carved as female."[51]

Kota *Mbulu-Ngulu* Figure

The Kota people live in the west African region of Gabon bordering the Republic of Congo. Among their most distinctive forms of art are objects known as *mbulu-ngulu* (or *mbulungulu*) (see Figure 8.9). Although these objects are often called "reliquary figures," it might be rather more accurate to describe them as "guardian figures." These objects were tied to cloth bundles or baskets of relics (known as *bwete*) and served to protect the relics while also providing a focus for prayers and rituals honoring the prominent ancestors whose bones were contained in the *bwete* bundles. The practice of honoring ancestors is a shared feature of many traditional African religions. Of course, the practice of collecting and venerating the bodily remains of important figures is common to many of the world's religious practices as well as the custom of creating objects of art to contain or signal the presence of relics.

There are a number of regional forms and variations of *mbulu-ngulu*. Traditionally, these figures are made of wood and covered with metal (copper or brass) sheets. They have enlarged, flat, oval, or shovel-shaped faces with stylized features indicating eyes, nose, and mouth. Many examples show a variety of hair styles, different degrees of elaboration with flat projecting flanges to the top or sides incised with decorative patterns, and indications of jewelry, such as earrings and neck bands. The enlarged heads customarily sit atop tall necks and are fixed to a minimally represented body (of V or diamond shape) symbolizing a human figure.

The *bwete* bundles/baskets and their *mbulu-ngulu* figures were intended to be kept safely in shrines dedicated to the veneration of ancestral figures, whose power and efficacy guided the fortunes of the people. Divorced from their original settings and presented as objects of art—or of ethnographic interest—the *mbulu-ngulu* figures lack their full context. Nevertheless, these are among the

objects of African art forms most prized by collectors, and response to this market has also generated the lively production of recent examples of this traditional art form.



Figure 8.10 Yoruba *Iroke Ifa* wand, wood, Nigeria. Private collection. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

Yoruba *Iroke Ifa* Divination Wand

The complex system of divination known as Ifa is characteristic of the Yoruba peoples of southwestern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo, and continues to be practiced by many adherents today in various regions of the world.[52] Divination systems, in general, represent means to communicate with and learn the will of spirit forces and may be employed in any number of life stages and decision-making situations.

Ifa divination is undertaken by specially trained practitioners or priests known as *babalawo,* who employ a variety of consecrated ritual objects in the ceremonies. Among these are tappers, or wands, known as *iroke ifa,* which are used to invoke the oracular spirits and powers and guide the divination process (see Figure 8.10). Most often made of wood or ivory, *iroke ifa* are tapped, by the priest, against a wooden divination tray (known as *opon ifa*) on which wood dust or powder has been sprinkled. Invocations are chanted and the process continues through a series of stages in which markings are made in the powder on the divination tray based on the number and order of palm nuts (or shells) that are successively drawn from a special container by the priest. It is a highly orderly, complicated, and multifaceted ritual in which consecrated objects play a critical role.

Wands or tappers are often elaborately carved with important and complex symbols, such as the wooden example illustrated here. The conical projection at the top is said to represent the inner head or *ori inu* of the supplicant(s) for whom the divination is performed. This symbolizes "a person's past, present and future and the essence of his/her personality."[53] The middle section of the example shown depicts a kneeling, nude female figure holding her breasts. A frequent figure on *iroke ifa,* she serves as an intermediary and symbolic carrier of life force. Her prayerful, kneeling position (also associated with childbirth) represents "the most appropriate way to salute the orisa or divinities, who are known as Akunlebo ('the-ones-who-must-be-worshiped-kneeling-down'). Her nudity is evidence of the solemnity of the moment."[54]

As sculptural carvings, *iroke ifa* may be greatly admired for their styles, materials, formats, and fine details. However, an understanding of the function and

purpose of these objects greatly enhances this comprehension. *Iroke ifa* functioned as one critical element in complex rituals involving a plethora of other objects, actions, and attitudes. Seeing "art and ritual as integral to each other" is essential to understanding the complete context.[55]

NOTES

1. See, for example, Tom Phillips, curator (with essays by Kwame Appiah, Suzanne Blier, Ekpo Eyo, Henry Gates, and Peter Mark), *Africa: The Art of a Continent* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996); Monica Visonà, Robin Poyner, Herbert Cole, and Michael Harris, *A History of Art in Africa* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001); and John Mack, ed., *Africa: Arts and Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

2. Ekpo Eyo, "Putting Northern Africa Back into Africa," in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, curated by Tom Phillips, 9–14.

3. Rosalind Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa* (London: Cassell, 1996), 1–21.

4. Peter Mark, "Is There Such a Thing as African Art?" *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 58, no. 1 (1999): 7–15.

5. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa*, 4.

6. For example, see the section titled "African Culture and Western Attitudes toward African Religion" in Douglas Thomas, *African Traditional Religion in the Modern World* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 43–82.

7. Many scholars have addressed these issues extensively. See Monni Adams, "African Visual Art from an Art Historical Perspective," *The African Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (1989): 55–103; Paula Ben-Amos, "African Visual Art from a Social Perspective," *The African Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (1989): 1–53; Suzanne Blier, "Words about Words about Icons: Iconologology and the Study of African Art," *Art Journal* 47, no. 2 (1988): 75–87; and Jacqueline Chanda, "Alternative Concepts and Terminologies for Teaching African Art," *Art Education* 45, no. 1 (1992): 56–61.

8. "The word 'primitive" of course is Protean in its meanings. Its basic sense is 'primary in time,' and by extension undeveloped, simple, crude, unsophisticated. . . . An attempt is sometimes made among art historians to justify the use of the term 'primitive art' on the grounds that 'we know what we mean by it.' . . . Art historians may think that they know what they mean by the term, though they have failed to produce a working definition. . . . Even as used by art historians the term has several distinct meanings." Frank Willett, *African Art: An Introduction* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 27–28. See also the lively and detailed discussion in Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

9. For an excellent sampling, see: William Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism" in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern.* 2 vols. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984); Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); and Patricia Leighten, "The White Peril and L'Art Nègre: Picasso, Primitivism and Anticolonialism," *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 4 (1990): 609–30.

10. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa*, 5.

11. For example, Jean-Baptiste Bacquart, *The Tribal Arts of Africa* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

12. Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition,* ed. Eric Hobshawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211–62, especially 247–62.

13. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa,* 6–7.

14. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa,* 9.

15. Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 230–43.

16. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa,* 11.

17. See, for example, Rowland Abiodun, "Understanding Yoruba Art and Aesthetics: The Concept of *Ase*," *African Arts* 27, no. 3 (1994): 67–78, 102–3.

18. Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Mythology* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1967), 18–19.

19. Parrinder, 66.

20. Mary Nooter, ed., *Secrecy: African Art That Conceals and Reveals* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993); and Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen Roberts, eds., *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1996).

21. Rosalind Hackett, "Women in African Religions," in *Religion and Women,* ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 61–92.

22. John Matthews, ed., *The World Atlas of Divination* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1992), 93–108

23. The terminology used to describe these practices is often rather problematic and laden with cultural biases. Terms such as "magic," "witchcraft," and "sorcery" often imply Western-based notions of primitive superstitions, and many Westerners encountering the arts and beliefs of Africans in the colonial period especially tended to use these terms in a highly pejorative fashion.

24. A plethora of sources address these issues; see Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

25. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa,* 5.

26. Ena Heller, "Religion on a Pedestal: Exhibiting Sacred Art," in *Reluctant Partners: Art and Religion in Dialogue,* ed. Ena Heller (New York: Gallery at the American Bible Society, 2004), 122–41; Chris Arthur, "Exhibiting the Sacred," in *Godly Things: Museums, Objects and Religion,* ed. Crispin Paine (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 1–27.

27. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa,* 15.

28. John Mack, "African Masking," in *Masks and the Art of Expression,* ed. John Mack (New York: Harry N. Abrams: 1994), 33.

29. Maria Kecskési and László Vajda, "I Am Not Myself," in *African Masks: The Barbier-Mueller Collection,* Iris Hahner, Maria Kecskési, and László Vajda (Munich, Germany: Prestel, 2007), 14.

30. Kecskési and Vajda, 14.

31. Robert Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), and Herbert Cole, ed., *I Am Not Myself: The Art of African Masquerade* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, Museum of Cultural History, 1985).

32. This raises some excellent terminological issues again, "with expressions of the body in motion—we are far from the habitual terrain of art historians. . . . does dance become an object of the art historian's attention only at the moment the dancers wear masks?" Peter Mark, 13.

33. John Nunley and Cara McCarty, *Masks: Faces of Culture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), and Gary Edson, *Masks and Masking: Faces of Tradition and Belief Worldwide* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005).

34. Mack, "African Masking," 35.

35. Kecskési and Vajda, 33.

36. See the useful diagrams in Kecskési and Vajda, 15–16.

37. Hans Silvester, *Natural Fashion: Tribal Decoration from Africa* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008).

38. Monni Adams, "Women and Masks among the Western Wè of Ivory Coast," *African Arts* 19, no. 2 (1986): 46–55, 90; and Elizabeth Tonkin, "Women Excluded? Masking and Masquerading in West Africa," in *Women's Religious Experience*, ed. Pat Holden (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 163–74.

39. Mack, "African Masking," 43.

40. Pascal Imperato, "The Dance of the Tyi Wara," *African Arts* 4, no. 1 (1970), 8.

41. Monica Visonà, "Mande Worlds and the Upper Niger," in *A History of Art in Africa*, Monica Visonà, Robin Poyner, Herbert Cole, and Michael Harris (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 117.

42. Imperato, 8.

43. Imperato, 8.

44. Imperato, 72.

45. Imperato, 73.

46. Wyatt MacGaffey, catalogue entry no. 50 , in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, curated Tom Phillips, 106.

47. MacGaffey, 106.

48. Mack, *Africa: Arts and Cultures*, 147.

49. Ezio Bassani, "Kongo Nail Fetishes from the Chiloango River Area," *African Arts* 10, no. 3 (1977): 36–40, 88; and Wyatt MacGaffey, "The Eyes of Understanding Kongo Minkisi," in *Astonishment and Power*, ed. Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael Harris (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 21–103.

50. Bacquart, 32.

51. Herbert Cole, "Akan Worlds," in *A History of Art in Africa*, Monica Visonà, Robin Poyner, Herbert Cole, and Michael Harris, 211.

52. John Turpin and Judith Gleason, "Ifa: A Yoruba System of Oracular Divination," in *The World Atlas of Divination*, ed. John Matthews, 101–8.

53. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa*, 124.

54. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa*, 125.

55. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa*, 126.

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Judaism

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Judaism is the oldest of the three major monotheistic religions of the world. Both Christianity and Islam later evolved from the foundations of Judaism. Although Judaism today is one of "the smallest of the world religions . . . it has had an influence and a geographical distribution inversely proportional to its size."[1] With a lengthy, often unsettled, and dramatic history of dispersal, assimilation, and persecution, Judaism's survival and tenacity are remarkable evidence of the strength of this ancient faith.

The origins of the Jewish faith are traditionally traced back to the second millennium BCE as recounted in the Hebrew scriptural accounts of the lives and deeds of the great patriarch and prophet Abraham and the eminent prophet Moses. Both of their lives are set in the mid-second millennium BCE. Abraham, who lived in ancient Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), is considered to be the first to receive direct revelations from the one true God, the creator of the universe. The belief in the primacy of this one God posed a contrast to the contemporary polytheistic practices of the other ancient peoples of Mesopotamia and established Judaism as the world's oldest monotheistic belief system. According to tradition, God entered into a covenant (pact, agreement) with Abraham, whose absolute trust in and loyalty to God would be rewarded by prosperity and a homeland for his descendants. Abraham was originally named Abram, and the covenant with God was symbolized by his taking on the new name, Abraham ("Father of Many Nations"). The peregrinations of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, through the eastern Mediterranean regions, the births of

his children and grandchildren, and their eventual move to and enslavement in Egypt form the major narratives of early Jewish history as recorded in the biblical book of Genesis.

Of singular importance for the greater formation and development of the Jewish religion is the figure of the prophet Moses, who was chosen by God to free the Israelites and lead them out of captivity in Egypt during the 13th century (ca. 1240) BCE. This event, known as the Exodus (and described in the biblical book of Exodus), involved many years of traveling in the wildernesses of the Sinai peninsula en route to the promised land of Canaan/Israel. During these years, guided by a series of revelations from God, Moses established the fundamentals of the Jewish faith in the form of laws and commandments regarding ritual practice and ethical conduct. The receipt by Moses, on Mount Sinai, of the Tablets of the Law (including the Ten Commandments) is often seen as the single most important event in the formation and codification of the Jewish faith. These God-given commandments ultimately confirmed the covenant between God and the Israelites and established Judaism as the faith of this distinct community of God's chosen people.

The Israelites ultimately reached the promised land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua and established a kingdom, ca. 1000 BCE, under a series of important monarchs: Saul, David, and David's son Solomon. The first temple in Jerusalem was constructed under the direction of Solomon in the mid-10th century BCE. This period suggests "a golden age that has remained the focus of Jewish aspirations ever since."[2]

Subsequent tumultuous centuries, however, involved periods of territorial loss and Jewish exile (notably as a result of the Babylonian invasion in the early sixth century BCE), the return of many Jews to Israel, first the Greek and then the Roman occupation of the territory in the first century BCE, the Jewish revolt against the Romans, the final destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the first century CE, and the eventual diaspora or dispersal of Jews around the world.

With the evolution and eventual dominance of Christianity in the Mediterranean (and ultimately European) world and the later growth and spread of Islam, Jews came to regarded by many as an inferior, heretical, and dangerous group, especially in Christian-dominated western Europe. Jewish history "in Christendom is one of nearly constant persecution. Massacres, expulsions, and forced conversions were common. . . . [Jews were] excluded from most professions . . . restricted in their choice of domicile . . . [and] sequestered in special town quarters."[3]

Anti-Jewish attitudes, or "anti-Semitism" (a term that properly refers to the racial/ethnic/language group of ancient Semitic peoples, including Arabs, but in standard usage refers only to Jews), has a lengthy history. Jews, like Christians in the Roman world, were persecuted for their refusal to worship the Roman gods and emperors and for their perceived subversive activities. Both Jews and Muslims were persecuted under Christian dominance in medieval and Renaissance Europe.

A notable period of exception to the social and religious antagonism between the three related faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is represented by Muslim-dominated Spain in the 10th through 12th centuries. Often referred to as a medieval "Golden Age" for Jews, or a period of "convivencia" (coexistence, toleration),[4] the Muslim dynasties of medieval Spain, with some exceptions, allowed Jews to flourish "in a manner unthinkable under Christian rule."[5] Although recent critical scholarship has questioned this "myth of an interfaith utopia"[6] in medieval Islamic Spain, this period is traditionally regarded as a time during which the virulent anti-Jewish attitudes of earlier and later periods were held, to some extent, in check.

Sephardic Jews (from the term *Sephardim,* "Spaniards") trace their heritage primarily to medieval Spain, whereas Ashkenazi Jews (from the term *Ashkenazim,* "Germans") trace their heritage primarily to medieval German lands. All Jews who refused to convert to Christianity were expelled from Spain in the late 15th century, and pressures in Christian-dominated northwestern Europe led to the departure of many Jews to eastern Europe. Jewish communities also developed among those who remained in the Middle East as well as in many other world regions: China, India, Ethiopia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Americas.

"The situation of Jews as the outcasts of Christian European society seemed to take a turn for the better"[7] during the 18th century "with the gradual emancipation of the Jews in western Europe and the Americas from their second-class status, as a result of Enlightenment ideals."[8] However, in the late 19th century, anti-Jewish movements again arose, based on racial supremacist concepts. According to these theories, Jews were racially inferior, and they were again subjected to persecution and revilement. The ultimate outcome of this modern anti-Semitism took place in the mid-20th century under the auspices of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), whose attempt to rid the world of the "racially inferior" resulted in the massacre of approximately two-thirds of the Jews in Europe during the Holocaust (1941–45). This unspeakable tragedy for the Jewish people also resulted in further mass migrations of Jews (especially to North America) and, ultimately, the founding of the modern State of Israel in 1948, designed to bring "an end to nearly 1900 years of Jewish disenfranchisement."[9]

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

"As a religion, Judaism has three essential elements: God, Torah, and Israel."[10] For Judaism, there is only one God, the creator of the universe, the transcendent ultimate reality "who is inherently beyond the capacity of words to describe."[11] The God of Judaism is, however, considered to be present and active in the world, and biblical narratives especially detail God's communications in various forms to humans. Judaism can be described as ethical monotheism, in that the belief in one God requires adherence to a set of codes of moral conduct—especially as contained in the Torah.

The Torah ("law," "teaching," "instruction") is the fundamental religious material for Judaism. Although the term can refer to the entire Hebrew Bible, in the strictest sense the Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible (also known as the "Pentateuch" or the "Five Books of Moses," that is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). These books contain the narratives of the creation of the world, stories of the early patriarchs and prophets, the enslavement and liberation (exodus) of the Israelites from Egypt, Moses receiving God's commandments on Mount Sinai, and the journeys of the Israelites to the promised land of Israel.

"The term 'Israel' denotes a historic political entity, a people, a nation, a belief system, a social group, a culture."[12] The original covenant, described in the book of Genesis, between God and the patriarch Abraham, involved God's promise of prosperity and territory, a homeland, for his faithful followers—the chosen people of Israel. This specific region, previously ruled over by Levantine powers and peopled by the Canaanites, was captured by the Israelites, according to the biblical narratives, after the death of Moses under the direction of the leader Joshua (approximately 1200 BCE). The kingdom, established shortly thereafter, eventually split into two territories after the death of King Solomon in the late 10th century BCE: the southern kingdom of Judah (from which the terms Judaism and Jew derive) and the northern kingdom of Israel (the name given by God to the patriarch Jacob). Ultimately, both territories were controlled by a series of invading empires (Assyrian, Babylonian), displacing substantial population to other parts of the general area and "setting a precedent for Judaism as an exilic faith during centuries of dispersal."[13] Although many Jews returned to Israel in the late sixth century BCE and lived under Persian, Greek, and ultimately Roman rule, the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE by the Romans and the dispersal of Jews worldwide resulted in the fact that "Jewish national aspirations were effectively shattered until the twentieth century."[14] Nevertheless, the land of Israel (in both actual and symbolic fashion) remained a source of hope and longing for Jews throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Salvation from oppression, linked with hopes of a messiah ("anointed one") who would lead the Jews to freedom, also coincided in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the movement of Zionism, which sought a return of the Jews to their homeland (Zion is another name for Jerusalem). In 1917 the Balfour Declaration recognized the Jewish homeland in Palestine, and many Jews resettled there under British governance. In 1948 the modern State of Israel was declared, "conceived as a haven for all Jews."[15]

Judaism's ethical monotheism, the importance of the Torah, and the significance of the land and people of Israel provide the primary foundations of the Jewish belief system. Through its lengthy history, Judaism has also grown and developed in culturally diverse contexts and has responded to the challenges posed for an ancient faith in historical evolution. In the modern period, Judaism exists in a number of different branches, primarily the Reform, Conservative,

Reconstructionist, and Orthodox variations. These defined movements arose largely in the 19th century and represent different interpretations of traditions, customs, and obligations. The "key practices" of Judaism vary widely in time and space, from strictly traditional to more liberal ways of practicing.

The interpretation of Judaism's traditions and customs has an extremely lengthy history. Although the Torah remains the fundamental set of scriptures for Judaism, several other texts (originally compilations of oral traditions) are also of signal importance. The Misnah (first compiled in the third century CE) as well as the Talmuds (sixth century CE) represent detailed studies of legal matters and ritual obligations ultimately based on the 613 commandments (including the Ten Commandments) revealed to Moses and contained in the written Torah. Ultra Orthodox Jews may perceive all of these obligations as inviolable, whereas others find them to be historically based and less applicable to modern life. How Jews observe the Torah will thus vary widely. For example, the system of dietary laws (*kashrut*), as noted in the Torah and detailed in rabbinic literature, involves highly specific instructions on foods that are permitted and foods that are forbidden, as well as details on the proper means of slaughtering animals and preparing food. Strict observers of these rules—in other words, those who keep "kosher" in their consumption of only ritually pure food (*kasher*)—will maintain different kitchen tools and implements for the separate preparation of meat and dairy products. Other Jews, who are less actively involved with religious traditions and customs, do not observe all or even any of these dietary restrictions.

Similarly, the observance of religious holidays, whether in synagogue or home contexts, varies widely. Strictly observant Jews attend synagogue for communal prayers and readings from the Torah several times per week and perform daily prayers at home as well. Others observe the weekly holy day or Sabbath (Shabbat—Friday evening through Saturday) in home rituals and/or by attending synagogue services. The Jewish religious calendar has a yearly cycle of major and minor festivals including the High Holy Days in the autumn, which celebrate the Beginning of the Year (Rosh Hashanah), Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot—the tabernacles or booths refer to the temporary structures used by the Israelites in their journeys to the promised land); the late fall/winter celebration of Lights (Hanukkah) commemorating the rededication of the Temple in the second century BCE; the spring festival of Lots (Purim), commemorating the deliverance of the Israelites from destruction in Persia; and the spring festival of Passover (Pesach), which celebrates God's delivery of the Israelites from Egypt.

Special meals, prayers, symbols, ritual objects, and scriptural readings are associated with all of these holidays, although, again, practices vary somewhat according to the historical context and views of the congregation. The maintenance, evolution, and reinterpretation of Jewish customs and traditions through the centuries—in a variety of geographic locations and cultural

contexts—provides witness to the living faith of Judaism, ultimately based on God, Torah, and Israel.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

The tribulations and tragedies of Jewish history from ancient times to the modern period have resulted in the destruction and dispersal of innumerable structures and objects of art. Literary references and some archaeological evidence, however, make it clear that from the very earliest periods of Jewish history, the production of liturgical art and the creation of an appropriate architectural structure to serve as a focal point for worship were paramount concerns. Indeed, as recorded in the book of Exodus (chapters 25–31), God gave Moses highly detailed instructions about the construction of the Ark of the Covenant—a portable carrying case for the Tablets of the Law upon which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. This gilded chest of acacia wood, with rings in the ends into which poles could be inserted for transportation purposes, was also eventually enriched with a pair of carved and gilded angels (or cherubim) on top. This precious object was carried by the Israelites through their decades of travels from Egypt until they reached their promised homeland of Israel.

The book of Exodus also contains highly detailed directions, from God, about the construction of a portable sanctuary (or "tabernacle"—from the later Latin translation of *tabernaculum*—or "tent") to serve as a moveable and temporary resting place for the Ark. Constructed partially of cloth and partially of wood, the tabernacle was divided into two sections: the "Holy of Holies"—a smaller interior space where the Ark was placed—and a larger "holy place" containing an altar, and area for bread offerings and incense, and a seven-branched candlestick, or lamp stand, made of gold. Further textual details specify the other objects for use in ritual offerings and sacrifices that took place in the exterior enclosed courtyard of the tabernacle. It should be noted, however, that "the costly materials, not to mention the skills in weaving, embossing, and the like, which were necessary to produce the appurtenances described in Exodus are, of course, completely out of keeping with a semi-nomadic existence."[16] Thus, "many Bible scholars have concluded . . . that these appurtenances to the Tent did not exist in the desert, but were inserted into the account at a later time by the final redactors,"[17] possibly based on later worship arrangements.

Nevertheless, whatever its original form or degree of decoration, the Ark of the Covenant contained the Tablets of the Law, and among the Ten Commandments, the Second Commandment speaks specifically against idol worship in the form of "graven" or "sculptured" images. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Exodus 20:4–5). Although it has

sometimes been assumed that this commandment (and its many later reiterations in the Hebrew biblical chronicles and prophetic writings) represents an anti-art or iconoclastic prohibition on the creation of images of any sort, it is also clear that "there has been no opposition in Judaism to art per se—only opposition to art which could be used for idolatrous purposes."[18] The following should also be noted:

> A religious text like the Second Commandment must be viewed against the historical backdrop or context which gave rise to its distinctive expression . . . Much confusion has been engendered by writers on the subject of the Second Commandment since—assuming it to be unchanging phenomenon, a monolithic concept—they usually discuss it outside its historical context. Such literal interpretations are based on an assumption which entirely overlooks the fact that within the Bible itself, different and varying attitudes are expressed toward images.[19]

This is a complex issue that has had a significant impact on Christianity and Islam as well—similarly, "religions of the book"—which stem from Jewish heritage. The acknowledgment or worship of any deities other than the one true God of these monotheistic belief systems is forbidden because "idols are useless in a universe controlled by a single omnipotent god of all creation."[20] Hence, for Judaism and Islam especially, any representation of the supreme being is impossible. "God is beyond sexuality, bodily forms and the visible world; he is creator of all things and therefore not to be identified with any one of them. . . . God (Yahweh, Allah) may not be represented in visual images."[21] At the same time, it is clear from the biblical narratives concerning the Ark of the Covenant, the ancient tabernacle, and the Temple in Jerusalem that the creation of "functional ritual objects which also served as visible religious symbols for inspiration and spiritual elevation"[22] was sanctioned and permitted from the earliest periods of Jewish history.[23]

The Temple and the Synagogue

After years of traveling, and after the capture of the city of Jerusalem by King David in the 10th century BCE, the Ark of the Covenant was ultimately enshrined in what was intended to be a permanent location: the Temple in Jerusalem[24] (see Figure 9.1). This impressive structure was created in the mid-10th century BCE under the direction of David's son, King Solomon, and is also described in great detail in the Hebrew scriptures (1 Kings, chapters 6–8.) The basic form and layout of the Temple followed the model of the earlier portable tabernacle, but in much more magnificent and durable form. Solomon's Temple was constructed of stone covered with aromatic boards of cedar wood. There were two tall bronze columns set at the entrance. With a longitudinal plan oriented on an east–west axis (the entrance was at the east end), the interior was divided into the two sanctuaries, with access to these areas restricted to priests. The Ark (perhaps raised up on a platform) was kept in



Figure 9.1 The Temple of Solomon, illustrated page from a Haggadah, Moravia, 1729. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

the inner room (the Holy of Holies), and the outer sanctum contained an incense altar, a table for bread offerings, 10 lamp stands, and other objects. The outer courtyard contained a large altar for sacrificial offerings (of animals and birds), 10 bronze basins on wheeled stands, and a larger bronze sea, or basin, supported by sculptures of 12 oxen. The Temple was referred to as the House of God—or the place where God's name was found—and the Ark and its contents represented and symbolized the special covenant between God and his chosen people, the Israelites.

Solomon's Temple was destroyed in 586 BCE when the Babylonians, under the direction of King Nebuchadnezzar, invaded and sacked the city. The Israelites were taken into captivity in Babylon, and at some point during this traumatic process, the Ark of the Covenant and its contents were lost, destroyed, or removed.[25] The Israelites were later allowed to return to their homeland under the Persian king Cyrus, and the Temple was rebuilt on a smaller scale in the late sixth century BCE. Centuries later, this temple was refurbished and enlarged under the direction of the Roman-appointed ruler of Judea, King Herod the Great (37–4 BCE), but the structure was again completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, during the Jewish uprising against Roman rule. Nothing remains of this temple apart from sections of the great masonry platform upon which it stood, notably the western wall (also known as the "Wailing Wall"), which is considered to be the holiest site in Judaism and a major goal of Jewish pilgrimage to the present day. The structures on the Temple Mount today are later Islamic buildings: the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque.

Although the Temple in Jerusalem was the major focal point for Jewish worship for many centuries, due to its destruction, loss of ritual objects, and ultimate obliteration, "it can be argued that the Temple became superfluous to the continuing existence of Judaism."[26] Indeed, it seems clear that alternative forms of Jewish worship, in addition to those rituals purely associated with the Temple, evolved as early as the sixth century BCE during the time of the Babylonian exile (following the destruction of Solomon's Temple). In exile, and deprived of their Temple, the Israelites gathered in small community groups or assemblies, known as synagogues. The word "synagogue" is a

Greek term meaning “assembly” and is derived from the Hebrew *bet keneset* or “gathering place.” Although there is little archaeological evidence of the construction of specific buildings to serve as synagogues until close to the end of the Second Temple period, it is clear that even “while the Second Temple was still standing, the synagogue already existed as an identifiable and separate institution.”[27] Ultimately, the synagogue replaced the Temple as the primary worship venue for Judaism. “After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the synagogue shifted from being the secondary congregational space in Judaism to the central religious institution in the life of the people of Israel.”[28]

Considerable scholarship has been devoted to the origins, early forms, and functions of the synagogue.[29] The term itself did not, at first, refer to a specific building or a particular type of building, but rather to a gathering of people for prayer and study. A quorum (or *minyan*) of 10 men was the minimal requirement, and communal prayer led by laymen (assembly members and educated experts in Jewish scripture and law—rabbis—or “teachers”) replaced the priest-led sacrificial rituals associated with the Temple. The earliest datable synagogue structures, in the sense of single-purpose buildings specifically constructed for Jewish worship, show a variety of plans and regional variations based on the materials and building styles of the late Roman world. Some are of a “basilican” plan with a longitudinal axis; some have an “apsidal” format with a semicircular niche or apse at one end; others, of a “broadhouse” plan, have a squarer format or a horizontal axis.

Fragments of sculptural decoration and mosaic floor pavements from early synagogues often depict important symbols, ritual objects, and some narrative scenes as well. For example, the mosaic floor of the early sixth-century synagogue at Maon in southwest Israel features a menorah flanked by lions (symbols of the kingdom of Judah), a *shofar* (or horn, sounded on holy days), *lulav* (palm fronds), and *ethrog* (citron, involved with festal celebrations), plus grapes, birds, and—rather unexpectedly—a pair of elephants (see Figure 9.2). These animals and objects are enclosed in a composition of 55 medallions created by tendrils issuing from a vase. The overall style of this mosaic pavement is similar to contemporary examples of Christian Byzantine mosaics. A sculptural relief fragment from the early synagogue at Gadara in Israel (first or second century CE) also shows a menorah, *shofar,* and palm fronds (see Figure 9.3).

Through the lengthy history of synagogue construction from ancient times to the present, the buildings show a great diversity of architectural styles and decoration depending on their geographic location, the historical period, and the architectural vocabulary of different eras. Certainly, this “reflects the circumstance that Jewish history . . . developed and evolved primarily within multiple societies, cultures, and civilizations.”[30]

For example, the 13th-century synagogue of Santa Maria la Blanca (so named after it was converted into a Christian church in the early 15th cen-

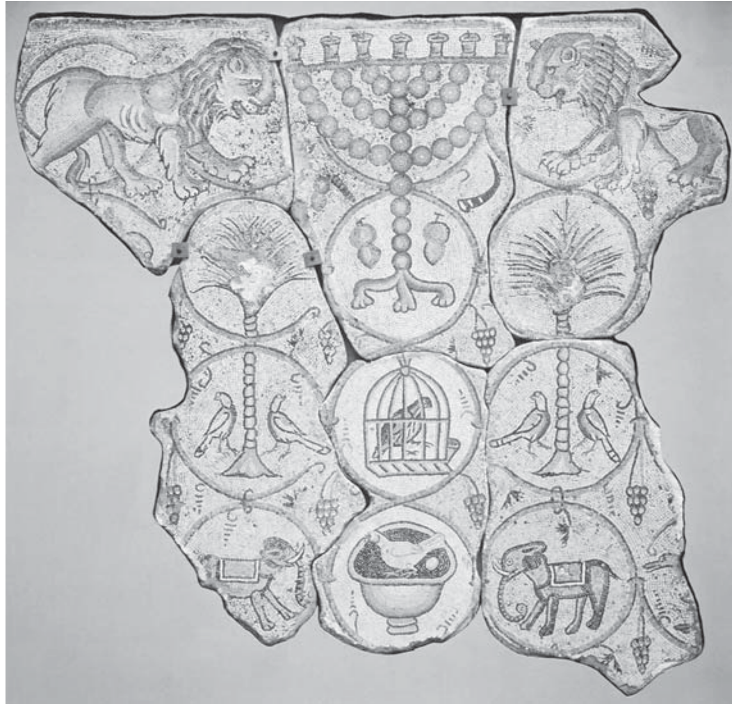


Figure 9.2 Mosaic pavement, Synagogue at Maon, Israel, early sixth century CE. Snark / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 9.3 Sculptural fragment, Synagogue at Gadara, Israel, first to second century CE. Paris: Louvre. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

tury) in Toledo, Spain, shows Islamic-style, horseshoe-shaped arches in its five-aisled interior (see Figure 9.4). The deeply carved capitals and sculptural decoration on the spandrels and upper levels of the inner aisles show complex foliage, scrolls, and geometric interlacing patterns. The architectural and decorative vocabulary used here might be described as fundamentally Islamic, reflective of the fact that the Iberian Peninsula was under Muslim rule for a number of centuries during the Middle Ages. Although the synagogue was constructed after the Christian conquest of the city in the late 11th century, it is an excellent example of the "complex interrelationships between cultures that resulted when Christian rulers presided over an artistic tradition that had been developed under Islamic rule."[31] The mid-13th century Altneuschul "Old New" synagogue in Prague (Czech Republic), often described as the oldest synagogue in Europe, shows Gothic-style pointed arches and rib vaulting (see Figure 9.5), whereas the late 18th-century synagogue at Cavaillon in southern France is a small gem of the decorative Rococo style, complete with silver and gold leaf details of shells, fruit baskets, and graceful foliage festoons in a wood-paneled pink and white interior (see Figure 9.6).



Figure 9.4 Synagogue of Santa Maria la Blanca, interior, Toledo, Spain, 13th century. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.

Regardless of this stylistic diversity, there are, however, some specific architectural and liturgical features generally found in all synagogues, the chief of which is the container for the Torah scroll or scrolls. Reading from the Torah is an integral aspect of synagogue services, and the scrolls are the most precious possession of the community. A cabinet, box, or niche with doors, known as the "Ark" (recalling the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies in the ancient Temple), is provided for the safe storage of the Torah scrolls when they are not in use (see Figure 9.7). Generally this is located on the wall faced by the congregation, so that the Ark forms the visual as well as the liturgical focus in synagogues. Customarily, a hanging lamp with a perpetual light burning in it (the *ner tamid*—or eternal light) will be found near or in front of the Ark. This symbolizes the light of God and is also a reminder of the oil lamp that burned perpetually in the ancient Temple. The doors of the Ark are often concealed behind curtains, again reminiscent of the hangings in the inner sanctuaries of the ancient Temple.

The Torah scrolls often have special textile coverings or mantles, metal shields or "breastplates," and metal or wooden finials (*rimmonim*) (see Figure 9.8).



Figure 9.5 Altneuschul Synagogue, interior, Prague, Czech Republic, mid-13th century. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 9.6 Synagogue at Cavaillon, interior, France, late 18th century. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

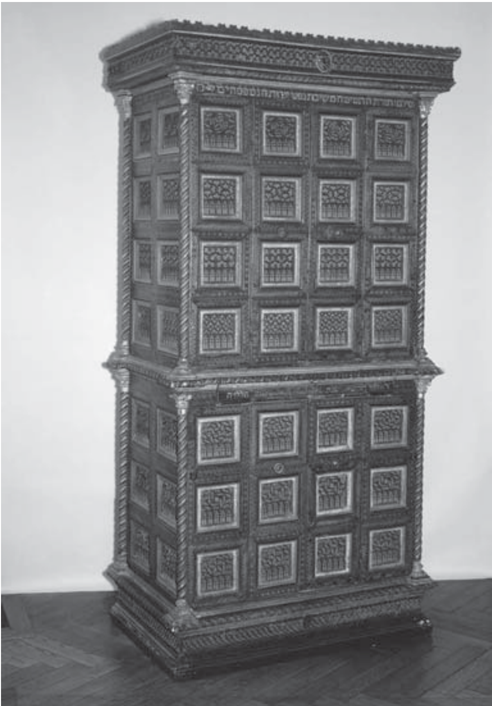


Figure 9.7 Torah Ark, from Modena, Italy, 1472. Paris: Musée National du Moyen Age—Thermes de Cluny. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

The care in handling these precious objects also may require use of a *yad* or pointer that allows readers to follow the text without actually touching it with hands or fingers. The term *yad* literally means "a hand" (see Figure 9.9). A raised platform or podium (known as a *bema* or *bimah*), from which scriptural readings are done, is also a common feature in synagogues (see Figure 9.10).



Figure 9.8 Torah cases and finials. Ferrara, Italy: synagogue. DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.

Depending on the historical or geographic context and the specific observances of the community, separate seating areas for men and women may be denoted; for example, an upper gallery area may be set aside for women. A number of other liturgical objects are associated with the daily and weekly activities traditional in synagogues, as well as specific articles used in annual festivals or days of special observance. These may include textiles, metal work objects, and manuscripts.

Traditionally, the scrolls of the Torah are never illustrated with narrative imagery or decorated with images of any sort. However, illuminated manuscripts of other formats were widely produced, especially during the medieval and Renaissance periods, and represent one of the most significant forms of Jewish art. The earliest surviving examples come from Egypt and Palestine and date to the 9th and 10th century. Hebrew manuscripts were produced in great numbers during the 13th through 15th centuries in western Europe, in 15th-century Yemen, and in 17th-century Persia. As is the case with synagogue architecture, the styles and forms of these manuscripts "reveal the stylistic trends prevailing in such Muslim countries as Palestine, Egypt, Yemen, and Persia under such rulers as the Fatimids, Mamluks, and Safavids. Similarly, in Christian Europe, the Hebrew miniatures from Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, and Italy evince the Romanesque, Gothic, Mudéjar, International, and Renaissance styles."[32] Among the religious manuscripts most often illuminated are Bibles, Psalters, legal works pertaining to Jewish law and custom, liturgical manuals, and especially manuscripts of the Haggadah (or "narration"—the text used for the celebration of Passover). These manuscripts, as a whole, also represent a lively tradition of figural narrative imagery in Jewish art, which, in spite of destruction and dispersal, can be traced back for centuries to some of the earliest surviving synagogues with mosaic floors and wall paintings and extends further to the modern period where Jewish art and architecture continue to flourish.[33]



Figure 9.9 Torah Pointers, Prague, Czech Republic. Scala / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 9.10 Manuscript illustration of a synagogue, from the "Sister Haggadah," ca. 1350, Northern Spain. London: British Library Ms Or 2284, f. 17v. HIP / Art Resource, NY.

EXAMPLES

Dura Europos Synagogue, Interior, Fresco Paintings, ca. 250 CE

Dating to the middle of the third century CE, the synagogue at Dura Europos (present-day Syria) represents one of the most renowned and well-studied examples of early Jewish art[34] (see Plate 17). Of special note are the extensive fresco paintings with biblical narrative scenes located on the interior walls of the main assembly hall. This rectangular-shaped hall/sanctuary was equipped with benches lining all four walls, and a niche (or *aedicula*) in the western wall served as a Torah shrine. The frescoes (done in the *secco*, or dry, fresco technique) are arranged in horizontal registers and represent an extensive array of narrative scenes.

When the synagogue was first excavated in the late 1920s and 1930s, scholars were absolutely astounded by the extent of the paintings and the many scenes and symbols represented.

> If there were any doubts beforehand as to whether or not such an art once existed in antiquity, then Dura put them to rest. To date, however, nothing even remotely comparable has been recovered elsewhere. Thus, while the euphoria over the first revelations of Dura has dimmed somewhat in the . . . years that have passed since the original discovery, these finds clearly indicate that a wider Jewish artistic tradition must have existed, one which will come to light sooner or later.[35]

The synagogue at Dura was one of several religious structures in the city. In addition to the synagogue, the city also contained a number of temples dedicated to Greco-Roman and Near Eastern deities, as well as an early Christian structure.[36] These buildings are of various dates and reflect the history and political-cultural transformation of the city beginning from its Hellenistic foundation in the late fourth century BCE by a successor of Alexander the Great. The city was under the control of the Parthian Empire from the second century BCE to the second century CE, when it was captured by the Romans in 165 CE. The synagogue dates to the period of Roman occupation of the city, which came to an end following attack by the Sasanians in 256–57 CE, after which the city was ultimately abandoned. During the siege of the city, a number of residential buildings and other structures close to the western surrounding walls, including the Christian building and the synagogue, were filled in to expand the defensive walls. Thus, although many structures were demolished, the series of archeological excavations of the early 20th century uncovered relatively undisturbed, buried evidence of well-preserved religious and domestic buildings.[37]

"No single site provides more material evidence about the diversity of religious expression in late Antiquity than does Dura Europos."[38] It might also be said that no single site from late Antiquity has provided more fodder for scholarly dispute and criticism of archeological and interpretive methods than has Dura.[39] The fresco paintings of the synagogue have been extensively studied

since they were first uncovered, and the bibliography on these materials is vast. Even so, there is a great deal of scholarly disagreement about the identification of some of the individual subjects depicted, as well as the relationship of the individual scenes to any overall, unifying narrative program (if one presumes such to have been intended).

> Most of the copious scholarly literature on this synagogue has been devoted to the meaning of these scenes. All agree that they represent, in one form or another, high points in biblical history, when the hand of God was evident in guiding the destiny of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, the question arises as to the basis of the selection of these particular events, and the extent to which there is a central idea pervading all the scenes. Were these scenes selected at random, or is there a fundamental organizing principle underlying the choice?[40]

About 40 percent of the paintings on the wall surfaces are destroyed; only fragments remain on the east wall, and significant portions of the upper and middle registers on the south and north walls are also missing. The best preserved is the western wall, in which the Torah shrine is located. This wall was oriented in the direction of Jerusalem, and the paintings on this wall include several depictions of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Ark of the Covenant, the ancient tabernacle, and ritual objects associated with the Temple. These visual references to Jerusalem and the Temple may be seen as creating a sense of "memorialized Temple space"[41] within the architectural form of the synagogue structure, with its focus on the Torah shrine. Other scenes on the western wall include episodes from the lives of Moses, Solomon, and David, whereas scenes on the north and south walls feature episodes from the lives of the prophets Ezechiel and Elijah.

The synagogue at Dura was an enlargement of a smaller building on the site that dated to the mid-second century CE. The assembly hall in the first synagogue held about 60 to 65 participants, whereas more than 120 people could gather in the expanded assembly hall of the enlarged synagogue. This interior space may have been the largest public room at Dura, which perhaps indicates significant growth of the Jewish community during this era. Indeed, it appears that the city of Dura, generally, was a venue in which practitioners of a variety of different religions coexisted in some form during the late Antique period. All of the religious structures at Dura were designed for specific groups (a growing Christian community, a flourishing Jewish community, the Roman military and administrative community with temples dedicated to traditional Roman deities as well as a Mithraeum—for worship of the god Mithras—popular with the Roman military). These structures were generally all enriched with either sculptural or painted decoration with appropriate imagery or narratives. The pictorial program within the synagogue was among the most extensive and continues to provide a focus for scholarly discussion of the possible sources, style, and meaning of this unique cycle of early Jewish narrative art.

Two Hebrew Manuscripts from the 14th Century

Hebrew manuscripts were produced in great numbers in Europe during the Middle Ages. The surviving examples exhibit a diverse range of formats and styles depending on where and when they were created. Some of these manuscripts are richly decorated with figural narrative imagery in styles similar to contemporary Christian illuminated manuscripts, while also demonstrating specific Jewish iconography and pictorial interpretations.[42] Other manuscripts, especially those produced in some areas of Spain, tend to use a purely decorative vocabulary akin to Islamic art forms. Yet other examples show the distinctive use of miniature (micrographic) writing for texts and pictures. The 14th-century Bible from Germany, illustrated in Figure 9.11, is a fine example of Hebrew micrography, and the 14th-century "Golden Haggadah," produced in northern Spain, is an excellent example of a Hebrew manuscript with an extensive cycle of illustrations in an essentially European Gothic style (see Plate 18).

Although the practice of micrographic writing can be found in non-Jewish cultures also, some scholars have argued that micrography is an essentially and distinctively Jewish art form.[43]

> Other scribal traditions also use writing in order to form pictures, but their method usually is to adjust the length of lines in order to create an object which can then, if required, be indicated additionally in outline. Jewish scribes did this too, but their unique contribution was to make designs by writing continuously in tiny script, often weaving the most intricate patterns. This can be seen very well in German Bibles.[44]

The German Bible, produced ca. 1343, shows the opening page of the Book of Genesis with the enlarged Hebrew letters spelling *Bereshit* ("In the beginning"). The text continues in columns below, and the page is otherwise elaborated with micrographic writing forming geometric designs, an arch, medallions, and panels containing animals and other motifs. These micrographic texts are sections of commentary or "notes called the *masorah,* which surrounds the Biblical texts and contains guidance as to the writing of specific words and their pronunciation, notes on the frequency of rarer words, remarks on different scribal traditions and so on."[45] These



Figure 9.11 Hebrew Bible, ca. 1343, Erfurt, Germany. Berlin: Staatsbibliothek Ms Or fol 1210, f. 1b. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

scholarly notes were originally composed during the sixth through ninth centuries CE, and "it is the *masorah* which is frequently used in Hebrew manuscripts for micrographic designs."[46]

Generally speaking, the patterns and animal forms in such examples bear no actual or obvious relationship to either the biblical or the masoretic texts, although certain forms, such as the prominent lions of Judah in this case, may function in a symbolic fashion as well. The architectural niche-like form surmounting the main letters on this page may also have symbolic meaning, for example indicating that the Bible is the "holy sanctuary"[47] for Judaism. Other manuscripts show examples of micrography in the shape of menorah or candelabra forms, but in general, no direct relationship can be seen between the texts and the designs created with them. This fact has long puzzled and intrigued scholarly specialists who are generally rather reluctant to ascribe the popularity of this form (which is, after all, found in the sacred context of Judaism's holy scriptures) purely to expressions of scribal whimsy or flights of creative fantasy to relieve the tedium involved with this painstaking and "not particularly exciting occupation"[48] of detailed text copying. Because "particular love and care were lavished on the copying of manuscripts of the Bible, the most sacred possession of the Jewish people,"[49] several scholars believe that the decorative and figural designs of the micrographic masorah texts are a reflection, ultimately, of the long reverence for the written word in Judaism generally as well as the growth, in medieval Europe, of mystical schools of thought that endowed letters and words with highly complex spiritual meanings.[50] Hence, far from being a purely decorative form of art, micrography may be seen as "a means of suggesting all the potentialities of creation inherent in the letter. Inasmuch as all of creation preexisted in the letter and its combinations in the Torah, the word and the letter became the only and natural form for expressing all of the creative possibilities of the Word."[51]

This may also explain why narrative illustrations are relatively uncommon in Hebrew Bibles per se, whereas biblical narrative scenes are frequently found in other types of medieval manuscripts, most especially those of the Haggadah. "Although the text of the Haggadah was already fixed in its essentials during the second century [CE] . . . other passages were added later up to the 13th century,"[52] and it was during the medieval period that "the illustrated Passover Haggadah emerged in Europe as a new type of book around 1300."[53] Some of the most richly illustrated medieval Hebrew manuscripts are examples of this text, which is customarily read in traditional Jewish homes during Passover (*seder*) celebrations in the spring. The Haggadah texts include "a collection of biblical and homiletical verses, poems, and religious customs and songs, focusing essentially on the Exodus of the ancient Hebrews, their attainment of freedom from Egyptian bondage, and their ultimate hope of redemption with the coming of Elijah, the messianic herald."[54] The lavish "Golden Haggadah," produced in northern Spain ca. 1320, is among the most noted

and well-studied examples of medieval Hebrew illuminated manuscripts[55] (see Plate 18).

In addition to in-text decorations and illustrations, the "Golden Haggadah" includes a notable cycle of 14 prefatory full-page illustrations, each divided into four framed scenes. The name of the manuscript reflects the extensive use of gold leaf backgrounds enriched with stamped diamond patterns in these scenes. The illustrations primarily cover selected sequential narrative episodes in the biblical books of Genesis and Exodus; the scenes are visually read from left to right and from top to bottom of each page. Scholars have identified the hands of two different (anonymous) artists responsible for the narrative illustrations in the manuscript, both of whom were clearly conversant with the figure style, iconography, and page layout formats of contemporary French and Italian luxury manuscript production. It is unknown for whom the manuscript was originally created, although "in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries noble Jewish patrons at the European royal courts were keen to have the Haggadah illuminated in the book painting style of the time."[56] It was probably produced in a Catalan workshop in Barcelona during the early 14th century, during which period "the Jewish community of Barcelona was . . . one of the most prominent and affluent in Spain."[57] It is one of the earliest surviving Spanish illustrated manuscripts of the Haggadah.

The two facing pages shown here include scenes from the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and are based on biblical passages as well as rabbinic commentaries. The scenes include the following: Lot's wide turned into a pillar of salt, the sacrifice (or "binding") of Isaac, Isaac blessing Jacob, Jacob's dream of the heavenly ladder, Jacob wrestling with the angel, Joseph's dream, Joseph relating his dreams, and the appearance of an angel to Joseph. The figural style, facial types, drapery patterns, gestures, color schemes, landscape features, and architectural elements all reveal an expressiveness and elegance typical of High Gothic illumination of the time and compare well with contemporary French and Italian examples especially.

> The patrons who commissioned the sumptuous Spanish illuminated Haggadoth [plural of Haggadah] must have been Jews with not only the financial resources to pay for such luxurious manuscripts, but also the taste, discernment and interest in the visual arts necessary to enjoy them. It is profoundly unfortunate that, following the ravages of time and of deliberate destruction, so few glorious illuminated Sephardi Haggadoth have survived to bear witness to the refined taste of their patrons.[58]

Marc Chagall, *Moses Receives the Tablets of the Law*, 1960–1966

What is "Jewish art"? Similar questions arise in defining the arts of other world religions. Is a work of art "Christian" or "Islamic" because it was produced by or for adherents to those faiths? Must a work of art contain spiritual content or have been designed for pious purposes in order to be classified as

"religious"? "The question of what is Jewish art and who is a Jewish artist is nowhere more problematic than in the fine arts . . . perhaps the most justifiable criterion for considering a work to be Jewish art is the issue of identity, perceived or real."[59] The renowned modern artist Marc Chagall (1887–1985) has been quoted as saying, "If I were not a Jew (with the content that I put into that word), I would not have been an artist, or I would be a different artist altogether."[60]

Chagall's lengthy and extremely prolific career spans the most tumultuous and disastrous decades for Jews in the 20th century. Born in Vitebsk (Belarus/Russia), Chagall's Jewish roots and experiences provided a consistent current throughout his career, both in his choice of subject matter and in his overall approach to his art. Although his subject matter ranged widely throughout his career, biblical subjects and images of Jewish life and spirituality were themes to which he consistently returned. The "Jewish world permeated the consciousness, the painterly and fictional worlds of Chagall"[61] in an intensely mystical and deeply spiritual manner, from his earliest images of his Russian homeland to his later stained glass window designs, such as for the synagogue of the Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center near Jerusalem.[62]

Chagall said that he had always been captivated by the Bible, ever since his early childhood, and that the Bible always seemed to him to be "the greatest source of poetry of all time."[63] Apart from single works illustrating or including biblical subjects,[64] at several points in his career Chagall was inspired to create larger series of biblical illustrations, interpreting the sacred texts in his own unique style. *Moses Receives the Tablets of the Law* is one in a series of large-scale oil paintings of biblical subjects that Chagall began in the 1950s (see Figure 9.12). The composition is dominated by the figure of Moses, who, in a dramatic diagonal movement, reaches upwards to reverentially receive the tablets proffered by the hands of the otherwise unseen God, whose presence is indicated in a gleaming cloudlike form at the upper right. The majesty and significance of the moment is shown by the overall radiance of the scene and the rays of light gleaming through the composition and glowing from the prophet's head. A complementary diagonal indicates the landscape setting of Mount Sinai where crowds of small figures gather in awe. The idol of the Golden Calf that the Israelites worshiped in Moses's absence can be glimpsed in the distance. Additional small figures appear elsewhere in the composition; these include an angel bearing Torah scrolls and a priest holding a menorah. Sketchily rendered architectural elements can be seen as well. Altogether, this work typifies Chagall's uniquely poetic and lyrical style as well as his ability to render extremely powerful messages from his beloved biblical sources. Chagall gave his Biblical Message series (an extensive group of large oil paintings, prints, watercolors, and sculptures) as a gift to the people of France in the late 1960s, and these works are housed in a museum which was especially constructed for them in Nice: the Musée National Message Biblique Marc Chagall.



Figure 9.12 Mark Chagall, *Moses Receives the Tablets of the Law,* 1960–66. Nice, France: Musée National Message Biblique Marc Chagall. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

NOTES

1. Carl Ehrlich, "Judaism," in *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions*, ed. Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.
2. Ehrlich, 18.
3. Ehrlich, 24.
4. Vivian Mann, Thomas Glick, and Jerrilynn Dodds, eds. *Convivenica: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain* (New York: George Braziller, 1992).
5. Ehrlich, 25.
6. Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–14.
7. Ehrlich, 25.
8. Ehrlich, 48.
9. Ehrlich, 25.
10. Ehrlich, 16.
11. Ehrlich, 26.
12. Ehrlich, 16.
13. Ehrlich, 21.
14. Ehrlich, 22.

15. Ehrlich, 51.
16. Joseph Gutmann, "The 'Second Commandment' and the Image in Judaism," in *No Graven Images: Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible,* ed. Joseph Gutmann (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971), 5.
17. Gutmann, "The 'Second Commandment,' " 4.
18. Michael Kaniel, *Judaism* (Poole, England: Blandford Press, 1979), 5.
19. Joseph Gutmann, ed., *No Graven Images: Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971), xiv–xv.
20. Albert Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 207.
21. Moore, 205.
22. Kaniel, 7.
23. For further discussion, see Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmation and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Vivian Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
24. Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
25. According to some Ethiopian traditions, however, the Ark of the Covenant was much earlier removed from Jerusalem by Menelek (the son of Solomon and Makeda, the Queen of Sheba) and carried to safe-keeping at the ancient Ethiopian capital of Aksum, where it remains enshrined (and hidden from view) to the present day, in a sanctuary chapel next to the cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion. See Roderick Grierson, *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 5–17.
26. Ehrlich, 42.
27. Ehrlich, 42.
28. Joan Branham, "Sacred Space under Erasure in Ancient Synagogues and Early Churches," *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 3 (1992): 383.
29. Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); and Leslie Hoppe, *The Synagogues and Churches of Ancient Palestine* (Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 1994).
30. Joseph Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 12–13.
31. Jerrilynn Dodds, "Mudejar Tradition and the Synagogues of Medieval Spain: Cultural Identity and Cultural Hegemony," in *Convivenica: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain,* ed. Vivian Mann, Thomas Glick, and Jerrilynn Dodds (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 113.
32. Gutmann, 13.
33. Grace Cohen Grossman, *Jewish Art* (New York: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1995); and Grace Cohen Grossman, *New Beginnings: The Skirball Museum Collections and Inaugural Exhibition* (Los Angeles: Skirball Cultural Center, 1996).
34. Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990).
35. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue,* 238.
36. Susan Matheson, *Dura Europos: The Ancient City and the Yale Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982).

37. For a detailed discussion of the excavation campaigns at Dura, see Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura Europos* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).

38. Annabel Wharton, "Good and Bad Images from the Synagogue of Dura Europos: Contexts, Subtexts, Intertexts," *Art History* 17, no. 1 (1994): 1.

39. Annabel Wharton, *Refiguring the Post Classical City: Dura Europos, Jerash, Jerusalem and Ravenna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

40. Lee Levine, ed., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 176.

41. Branham, 387.

42. For a detailed discussion of the relationship of Christian and Jewish iconography in medieval manuscripts, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Coping with Christian Pictorial Sources: What Did Jewish Miniaturists Not Paint?" *Speculum* 74, no. 4 (2000): 816–58.

43. See, for example, Leila Avrin, "Hebrew Micrography: One Thousand Years of Art in Script," *Visible Language* 28, no. 1 (1984): 87–95; Leila Avrin, "Micrography as Art," in *La Lettre Hébraïque et sa Signification*, ed. Colette Sirat (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1981), 43–50; and Stanley Ferber, "Micrography: A Jewish Art Form," *Journal of Jewish Art* 3/4 (1977): 12–24.

44. David Goldstein, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting* (London: The British Library, 1985), 4.

45. Goldstein, 4.

46. Goldstein, 4.

47. Avrin, "Micrography as Art," 46.

48. Avrin, 46.

49. Goldstein, 3.

50. Johanna Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), especially 129–58.

51. Ferber, 21.

52. Bezalel Narkiss, *The Golden Haggadah* (London: The British Library, 1997), 8.

53. Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Hebrew Manuscript Painting in Late Medieval Spain: Signs of a Culture in Transition," *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 2 (2002): 246.

54. Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting*, 19.

55. Narkiss, *Golden Haggadah*.

56. Ingo Walther and Norbert Wolf, *Codices Illustres: The World's Most Famous Illuminated Manuscripts 400 to 1600* (Köln: Taschen, 2001), 204.

57. Narkiss, *Golden Haggadah*, 64.

58. Narkiss, *Golden Haggadah*, 64.

59. Grossman, *Jewish Art*, 273.

60. Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 11.

61. Harshav, 121.

62. Jean Leymarie, *Marc Chagall: The Jerusalem Windows* (New York: George Braziller, 1967); and Alfred Werner, "Chagall's Jerusalem Windows," *Art Journal* 21, no. 4 (1962): 224–32.

63. Quoted in Jacob Baal-Teshuva, ed., *Marc Chagall: A Retrospective* (New York: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1995), 295.

64. For example, see Mira Friedman, "Marc Chagall's Portrayal of the Prophet Jeremiah," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschicte* 47, no. 3 (1984): 374–91.

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—10—

Christianity

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Christianity, along with Judaism and Islam, is one of the three major monotheistic religions of the world. It has a very lengthy history of change and transformation, is presently the largest of the world's religions, and is represented today by an enormous variety of different groups, branches, and denominations found in all areas of the world. The three main branches of Christianity today are Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant (which itself comprises hundreds of different denominations). All Christians, regardless of branch or denomination, accept the teachings of Jesus as central, even normative.

The religion of Christianity was begun by Jesus (Yeshu'a) of Nazareth, a Jew of humble origin who lived in the region of Galilee in what is now modern-day Israel. He is traditionally believed to have been born in the city of Bethlehem (ca. 4 BCE), to have been raised in the city of Nazareth by pious Jewish parents named Mary (Miryam) and Joseph (Yosef), and to have died in Jerusalem (ca. 30 CE). During his time, this area of the world was part of the vast Roman Empire, and the territory of Judea/Palestine where Jesus lived and taught was administered both directly and by Roman-appointed Jewish kings.

Jesus is briefly mentioned by several later Roman historians (in the early second century CE) and by Josephus (a first-century Jewish historian), but the principal sources of information about the life and teachings of Jesus are contained in the first four books of the Christian scriptures (or "New Testament"). These texts, known as the Four Gospels (authored by or associated with the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) include various accounts of his

career, words, and actions.[1] Written several decades after his death to promote the then-growing religion, the Gospels present Jesus as a teacher, healer, and miracle worker whose apocalyptic message of the coming of the kingdom of God challenged both Jewish and Roman authorities. His public career began when he was about age 30, after his baptism (or "washing of repentance") in the Jordan River by the Jewish prophet known as "John the Baptist." Jesus then traveled for a time through the rural regions of Galilee gathering followers who believed in his teachings and who saw him in some way as the promised messiah or savior of the Jewish people. He offered hope to all social classes, criticized some aspects of the rituals, practices, and hieratic structure of the Judaism of his time, and asserted principles of ethical behavior based on the fundamental Ten Commandments of Judaism but expanded via the "Beatitudes" (right behavior as a result of blessings), which he offered during his "Sermon on the Mount" (recounted in the Gospel of Matthew). This "new ethical system [extended] the Mosaic law in a way that became central to the formation of a distinctly Christian morality."[2] Jesus was a social and religious reformer whose sphere of influence was originally restricted to a relatively small group of Jewish followers and whose career was cut dramatically short by his execution by the Roman authorities, but his enormous impact has been of lasting and worldwide significance.

Although the deeds and teachings of Jesus during his lifetime provide the critical foundation for the Christian religion, his death and subsequent return to life (resurrection) are of absolutely signal importance in the Christian belief system. At the end of his life, Jesus

> was betrayed by one of his followers and arrested:[After] cross-examination by the Jewish authorities, Jesus was sent before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, [was charged] and found guilty of claiming to be the king of the Jews, a claim that was blasphemous under Jewish law and treason to the Romans. Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion, a normal Roman punishment for criminals, and died on the cross.[3]

The Gospels, however, tell that Jesus was raised to life several days after this, and some of his followers had experiences that inspired them to believe that he had been resurrected by God. This further convinced them of his status as the Messiah, the redeemer, the Christ (from the Greek *Christos*, a translation of the Hebrew term *mashiach*—messiah—the "anointed one of God"). The term "Christ" was originally a title given to Jesus to signify his role as the Messiah, and it then became used as a name: Jesus Christ. Thus, "Christians" are the followers of Jesus (the) Christ.

The news of Jesus's death, resurrection, and ultimate ascension to heaven spread rapidly among Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) alike. The missionary work of Saul of Tarsus (Saint Paul, ca. 3–65 CE) was especially instrumental in the spread of Christianity through the wider Roman world during the early growth

of the religion. Not among the original disciples or initial 12 apostles of Jesus (from the Greek *apostolos*, "messenger" or "delegate" of Christ), Paul, originally an avid anti-Christian, experienced a dramatic conversion, and became one of the most active and ardent supporters and spreaders of the faith, especially to Gentiles. A well-educated Greek-speaking Jew with Roman citizenship, "Paul was one of the first to articulate a Christian theology distinct from Jewish practice and law."[4] He journeyed widely through Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor promoting the new faith, and his writings (letters, or "epistles") to the growing Christian communities in these regions form the major section of the Christian New Testament.

Up through the early fourth century, Christianity continued to grow within the late Roman empire in spite of opposition. The spread and popularity of the religion and the perceived potential political threats to the authority of the Roman state resulted in periodic and at times extremely severe persecutions of Christians through the early centuries. These persecutions came to an end formally under the auspices of the Emperor Constantine (ca. 280–337) whose Edict of Milan in 313 declared "toleration" of Christianity—the religion to which he himself is said to have ultimately converted. The state support for Christianity represented by Constantine's toleration and conversion paved the way for Christianity to ultimately be declared the official religion of the Roman Empire, via edict of the Emperor Theodosius I (ca. 346–395) in 392. From this period onward, the history of Christianity became especially connected with the politics and events that took place in the late Roman world—the re-division of the Roman Empire into two jurisdictions: the Eastern Roman empire (or "Byzantine" empire—based in the city of Constantinople, the ancient Greek city of Byzantium) and the Western Roman empire (centered on the city of Rome).

The first through eighth centuries of Christianity are often called the "Patristic era" (from the Latin *Patres Ecclesiae*, "Fathers of the Church"). During this time, the Christian Church developed systems of administrative hierarchy and jurisdiction, based on Roman government models, and defined the basic and authorized tenets of the faith in a series of Church Councils, such as the Council of Nicea, convened by Constantine in 325, and the Council of Chalcedon, convened by the emperor Marcian in 451. The meetings served to clarify basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Various disputes and disagreements had arisen about such matters as the exact identity of Jesus, the role and position of Mary, and the definition of the Holy Trinity (defining Jesus's relationship to God). Many influential theologians discussed these issues in their writings. Heretical (incorrect) beliefs were identified and discarded as the early Church sought to codify the essential and correct (orthodox) fundamentals of the faith.

Many significant figures among the early Church Fathers include Saint Augustine (354–430, the bishop of Hippo), Saint Ambrose (ca. 339–97, the bishop of Milan), Saint Basil (ca. 329–79, the bishop of Caesarea), and Saint Jerome (342–420) who, at the direction of Pope Damascus, translated the Hebrew and Greek scriptures of the "Old" and "New" Testaments into

Latin. Jerome's translation is known as the "Vulgate" Bible, from the Latin *Versio Vulgata,* "Common Translation." The vast body of patristic literature was greatly expanded during the medieval period, often called the "Scholastic" era of Christianity. Major authors such as Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), whose writings represent highly intellectual and philosophical approaches to theological issues, are especially important for the history of Christianity.

During the earlier medieval period, an event of monumental significance took place for the Christian church, known as the "East-West Schism." In 1054, as a result of complex and long-standing cultural and doctrinal differences, the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman) churches formally split. A number of factors contributed to this, but it was most notably a result of the insistence of the Western Church on the ultimate authority of the Pope (bishop of Rome) over all Christians and all church matters. To the present day, the Orthodox and Catholic churches remain divided. The Catholic Church accepts the supreme authority of the Pope in Rome, whereas the Eastern churches are less centrally organized and are made up of several different and autonomous branches (such as the Greek Orthodox and the Russian Orthodox) governed by bishops and patriarchs (senior priests) and guided by councils.

The authority of the Roman Pope as well as other practices of the Catholic Church were again questioned definitively in the early 16th century, during what is known as the Protestant Reformation. The movement was begun by leaders such as Martin Luther (1483–1546), Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), and John Calvin (1509–64), who criticized the hierarchical structure of the Church and complained against many practices that they deemed corrupt. The Protestant reforming movements, in general, can be said to have been seeking a return to the foundations of the Christian faith, the fundamental teachings of Jesus, and the authority of the Bible, not mediated through any scholastic philosophy or religious institution (the Catholic Church in particular).

The history of Protestant Christianity from the 16th century to the present day is extremely complex and involves the growth of literally hundreds of different variations or denominations. Among the oldest Protestant groups, founded in the 16th through 18th centuries, are the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican (or Episcopal), Methodist, Congregationalist, and Baptist churches, all of which exist in numerous branches. The Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, and Jehovah's Witnesses were all founded in the 19th century, and the Pentecostal movement dates to the early 20th century. Other groups, such as the Unitarians (18th century) and Mormons (or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, founded in the 19th century), diverge significantly from other groups in their understanding and interpretations of the nature and role of Jesus.

In the wake of the challenges posed by the initial Protestant reformers of the 16th century, the Catholic Church responded via a period of internal reflection, renewal, and public outreach. Often called the "Catholic Reformation" or "Counter Reformation," this period was characterized by a reaffirmation of the Catholic faith, a modification of some of the practices deemed objectionable

by the Protestant reformers, a great flourishing of the arts, and the formation of new orders such as the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) under the leadership of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556).

> As Christianity moved into the modern period, powerful rationalist and skeptical influences were exerted on the faith by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of industrial capitalism, and advances in science from the seventeenth century to the present. Urbanization and secularization, particularly in the West, were among the factors that changed traditional roles and functions performed by the church and its community in earlier historical periods.[5]

In addition to the further development and growth of Protestant denominations in the early modern period, and intensive missionary work by Catholics as well as Protestant groups, the mid-20th century was especially marked by several events and new trends in Christianity. The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962, inspired significant changes in Catholic beliefs and practices. These included a simplification of the liturgy and use of local languages (rather than Latin) in church services. The decisions of Vatican II were designed to update and energize the Catholic Church. They also reflect the growing spirit of ecumenism—the acceptance of differences, if not actual conciliation, between the various branches of Christianity—as well as the hope for mutually beneficial dialogue with other world religions.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

Christian beliefs and practices have gone through many centuries of evolution and interpretation since the time of Jesus.

> Like any living religious tradition, the vitality of the Christian faith is evidenced in a continual process of reform and internal pluralism. Today, over four hundred denominations all identify themselves as Christian. Many regard this worldwide religious diversity as one of the greatest challenges facing Christianity in the modern world.[6]

The great diversity of Christian practices may also present some enormous challenges in any attempts to define what is foundational or most fundamental about the Christian religion. Catholic Christians diverge from Orthodox Christians in some significant ways; they follow different church calendars and, in some cases, celebrate different holy days. The major holy days in the Christian Church are Christmas (celebrating the birth of Jesus) and Easter (commemorating his resurrection.) Numerous other holy days are observed by different Christian groups.

The many denominations of Protestant Christianity, though largely sharing the distinction of being "non-Catholic" and "non-Eastern-Orthodox," have

different approaches to what they believe are the most important matters for Christians. Certain liturgical practices (which have themselves evolved and changed) have characterized Catholic worship services through history. Orthodox churches also have their unique rites, many of which would not be recognized at all or understood in either Catholic or Protestant churches of vastly different types. Nevertheless, there is unity in this diversity.

The Christian religion is monotheistic. Christians believe that there is one God alone and that this God is a supreme and transcendent being. This God-force is also an active principle in human lives and has communicated directly with humans through the ages. This God (sharing some continuity with the God of the Jews/Israelites) has offered and continues to require specific ethical behaviors of his followers. As an ethical monotheism, the religion of Christianity shares much with its Jewish ancestors and Islamic heirs. The focus of Christianity is, however, on the figure of Jesus Christ. The majority of Christians believe that Jesus was not simply an inspired teacher, or a social reformer, or an incarnation of any one of a number of divine beings, but that Jesus was and is the only Son of the One God who was sent to earth by God to fulfill God's promise of salvation for all humankind.

The concept of salvation—although fundamental for Christianity—has involved a number of different iterations and related precepts throughout Christian history. Diverse branches of Christianity have, in different eras, emphasized specific aspects of salvation, ranging from the rewards anticipated in a glorious afterlife in heaven (versus punishments for sinners in hell[7]) to the liberation from socially or personally oppressive situations.

> Salvation, the term for the state of redemption and reconciliation with God, is a primary spiritual goal of Christians. Aside from the Calvinist notion of predestination, which holds that only an elect body of worshippers is saved, in most Protestant communities salvation is guaranteed solely by the worshipper's faith, the acceptance of Jesus Christ. For Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, salvation is also dependent upon faith in the mysteries of the church, and on the fulfillment of sacraments. Interpretations of the path to salvation vary, but the belief that humans have an immortal soul is generally accepted in Christianity.[8]

Some Christian groups, notably Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, place great emphasis on the acknowledgment and veneration of saints. These holy figures range from the martyrs of the early Church through a progression of historical examples up to the present day. The process by which saintly figures are officially deemed worthy of veneration is known as canonization. This is especially developed in the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant groups tend to place far less emphasis on the mediating role of saints (including Mary), focusing primary attention on the figure of Jesus.

Regardless of group or denomination, Jesus provides the central focus for all Christians as the humanly embodied revelation of God. Belief in the divinity

of Jesus and adherence to his ethical teachings brings reconciliation with God. God's continued and abiding presence in human life is acknowledged by all Christians.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Given the diversity of Christian denominations, the lengthy history, and the worldwide spread of the religion, it is no surprise to see that an enormous variety of art and architectural forms are characteristic of Christianity at various periods in history and in different regions of the world. The function and purposes of Christian religious structures, and the use of and attitude toward visual imagery, have diverged as well.

The religion originally developed within the late antique Greco-Roman world, where artistic traditions in painting, sculpture, and architecture had long flourished. The production of art by and for Christians in the first several centuries was, however, somewhat restricted because of the uneasy position and often persecuted status of the new religion. Examples of the very earliest Christian art, such as the fresco paintings in the Roman catacombs (underground cemeteries), often make use of a symbolic visual vocabulary closely akin to works produced for non-Christian patrons. Subjects such as the "Good Shepherd," an image presumably understood by Christians to represent Jesus Christ in his role as savior of humankind, can ultimately be seen as based on the developed and popular pre-Christian Roman traditions of pastoral landscape scenes inhabited by sheep, shepherds, and other bucolic elements (see Figure 10.1). As with many other subjects and symbols found within the funerary context of the catacombs, there are problems with "knowing precisely what these early images meant to Christians—how far the memory of pre-Christian meanings survived and what changes were wrought by successive Christian interpretations."[9] A number of specific biblical (especially Old Testament) subjects appear in early Christian art, in catacomb frescoes, on carved sarcophagi, and on other small-scale objects. It has often been said that the selection of these particular scenes, many of which focus on God's miraculous interventions to save deserving humans from destruction (Daniel in the Lion's Den, Jonah and the Whale, Noah's Ark, and so on), appears to reflect the fears and



Figure 10.1 *The Good Shepherd,* catacomb painting, first through third century. Rome: Catacomb of Priscilla. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

hopes of Christians during these early centuries of oppression. These subjects, as well, may indicate a rich heritage of Jewish pictorial sources from which early Christians also drew.

After the Constantinian Edict of Milan in 313, the now-tolerated and soon-to-be-official religion of the Roman Empire entered an important phase of art and architectural activity. Swiftly growing Christian communities, with a rapidly expanding administrative structure as well, were in need of specifically designed churches for liturgical assemblies. Before the fourth century, Christian gatherings took place in private homes, in rented halls, or in open spaces such as markets.[10] There appears to be no literary or solid archaeological evidence for any structures being intentionally and exclusively designed for Christian worship before the fourth century, although some very early churches may rest on the foundations or sites of private homes previously used for Christian assemblies.

The architectural form used for the earliest actual Christian churches was adopted from the model of the Roman basilica (from the Greek *basilike*, "royal"). Basilicas were ubiquitous public structures in Roman towns and cities and were used for many purposes, such as audience halls, meeting halls, and law courts. The basilican model suited Christian purposes very well because it provided adequate interior space for communal gatherings. The horizontal, longitudinal layout of the Christian church-basilica customarily involved placement of the altar at the east end with the entrance on the west front. Depending on size, the main rectangular hall (nave) of the basilica might be subdivided by rows, piers, or columns, creating aisles. Traditionally, the east end terminated in a semi-circular shape called the apse. A transept with projecting arms, running perpendicular to the nave and creating a Latin cross plan for the overall building, also became a common feature. Many basilicas have an enclosed entry porch (narthex) at the west end, and several are preceded by an open-air courtyard (atrium). Old Saint Peter's in Rome, begun during the time of Constantine, provided the fundamental model of the early Christian basilica. "By the fifth century, every major city in Christendom possessed at least one church on the basilican plan, providing ample room for growing congregations"[11] (see Figure 10.2).

Centrally planned churches (of various layouts: circular, polygonal, and equal-armed cruciform—or "Greek cross" shape), topped by domes, also developed in the early Christian period. Variations on this style became especially characteristic of Byzantine and later Eastern Orthodox forms. An important early Byzantine example is the famous church of the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) constructed in the early sixth century in the city of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) under the direction of the emperor Justinian (527–65) (see Figure 10.3). This massive and complex structure, crowned by an impressive dome, provided inspiration for many later Byzantine structures as well as Islamic mosques, especially in the Ottoman Empire. The minarets (tall slender towers) were added after the mid-15th century when the Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque.

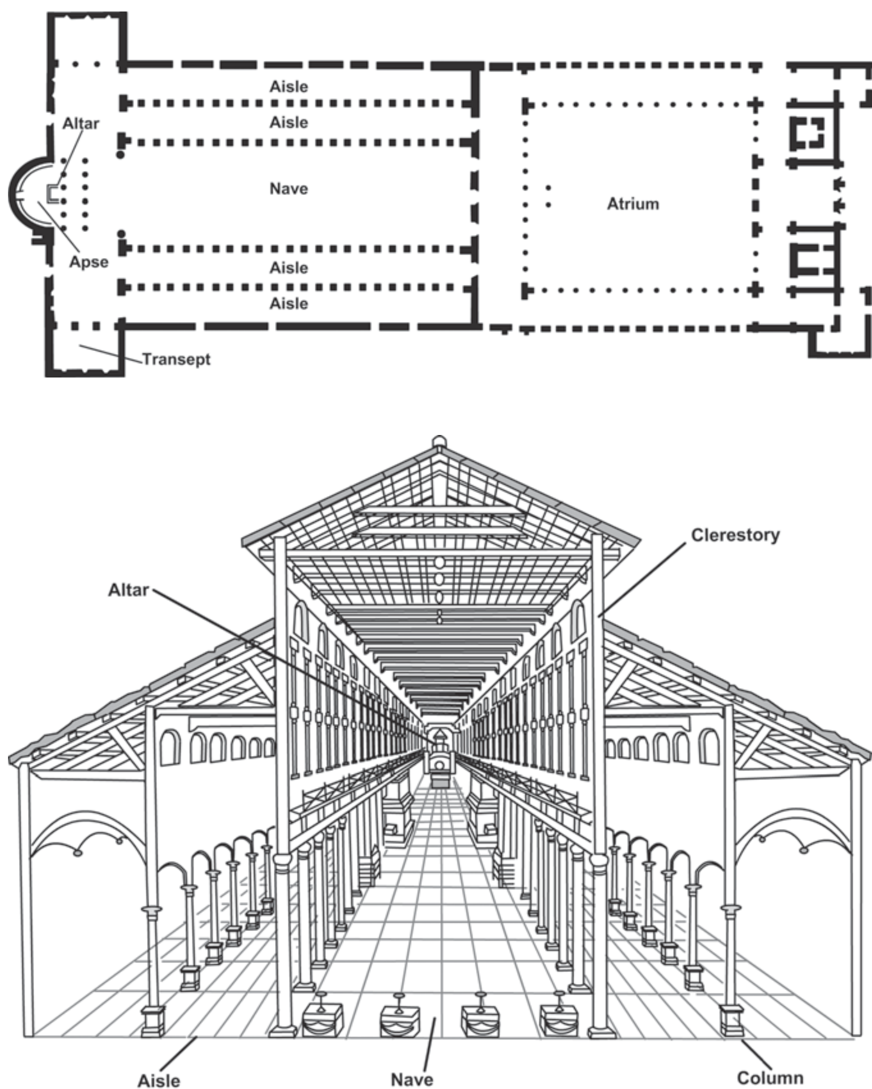


Figure 10.2 Floorplan (above) and diagram (below) of Old Saint Peters, Rome, Italy, early fourth century. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.

The early Christian basilican form has served as the basic model for many Western Christian churches up to the present day. In Western Europe, during the Middle Ages, many of the still-standing and most impressive monuments of Christian art were created. These Romanesque and Gothic buildings, constructed primarily during the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, are traditionally regarded as the epitomes of medieval Christian art and devotion—and the forms that have influenced and colored Christian art modes in the modern world as well. During the Gothic era, the use of architectural forms such as



Figure 10.3 Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey, early sixth century. Mediamix-photo / Dreamstime.com.

pointed arches, rib vaults, and exterior building supports in the form of flying buttresses resulted in the creation of tall and light-filled buildings that are extremely impressive on both the interior and the exterior for their enormous size and loftiness. The Cathedral of Notre Dame of Chartres, France, is one of the most celebrated examples (see Figure 10.4). The art of stained glass developed greatly during the Gothic period, and religious structures were often enhanced with many impressive examples of narrative and symbolic windows of colored glass (see Plate 19). Although the production and use of glass (for vessels and small-scale objects) has a very lengthy history, and the technology of glass production dates back to ancient Egypt, the use of colored glass for large-scale windows is especially characteristic of the Gothic period, when architectural advances allowed for the creation of larger windows.

Whether of round-arched Romanesque or rib-vaulted Gothic style during the medieval era, classically inspired Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries, dramatic 17th-century Baroque, or decorative 18th-century Rococo, Christian church architecture reflects a very wide range of historical and regional styles (see Figure 10.5). Simple wooden construction is typical of many American vernacular examples, and quaint, white-painted churches are a common sight in the American landscape. Numerous other examples of Christian church architecture, in unique and revolutionary forms, have been created by some



Figure 10.4 Notre Dame Cathedral, Chartres, France, 12th to 13th century. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

of the most notable modern architects, such as the pilgrimage church of Notre Dame du Haut, in Ronchamp, France, designed by Le Corbusier (1887–1965) in the mid-20th century (see Figure 10.6).

What take places within Christian churches, and their degree of interior and exterior decoration, varies widely throughout history and between different branches of the religion. From the earliest periods of Christianity to the present day, much discussion and debate has taken place about the proper role and function of art in the Christian religious context. As heirs to the Old Testament commandments conveyed by God to the ancient Israelites, Christians (as well as Jews and Muslims) have been deeply concerned with God's direction against creating or worshiping "graven images" or "idols." The fear of committing idolatry via the creation of any forms of religious imagery has been an underlying theme throughout the history of Christian art. Many Christian theologians have argued eloquently for the usefulness of art in providing inspiration and in serving didactic purposes in conveying biblical narratives and messages in visual and appealing form. Pope Gregory I ("the Great," 590–604) was an early advocate of the educational possibilities of the visual arts, stating, "To adore images is one thing; to teach with their help what should be adored is another. What Scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant, who see through them what they must accept; they read in them what they cannot read in books."[12]



Figure 10.5 Vierzehnheiligen Church, Germany, 1742–44. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Numerous other Christian authors, however, have been equally eloquent in describing the perilous sinfulness of image creation. This debate was especially heated in the Byzantine world during the eighth- and ninth-century "Iconoclastic Controversy." During this time period—of complex political dimensions too—religious imagery was banned. Images were destroyed, and the creation of holy images was prohibited. Pro- and counter-arguments were avidly presented.[13] Ultimately, the iconodules (supporters of images) triumphed. After the reaffirmation of images in the Byzantine world (celebrated by the Eastern Church in the Feast of Orthodoxy), the prominent role of icons (from the Greek *eikon*, "image," and more specifically, "holy image") in the liturgy and in private devotions in the Byzantine world continued to be a matter of divergence with the Western Roman Church and ultimately may be seen as one of the several factors contributing to the East–West Schism of 1054.

In the 12th century West, the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (ca. 1090–1153) again represent a type of iconoclastic stance, and the Cistercian monastic order that he revived was known for great austerity and minimal decorative art.[14] His contemporary Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis (1081–1151) was, however, one of the greatest art patrons of the time. Suger was responsible for the magnificent renovation and expansion of the Parisian abbey of Saint-Denis in the new Gothic style and produced glowingly written praises of the abilities of the religious arts to raise human spirituality to the highest realms.[15]

The Protestant reformers of the 16th century and later, in stances against the Roman Catholic Church and all associated with it, generally also represent a strongly iconoclastic tendency, eschewing the use of visual art as potentially idolatrous and misguided. There is thus a great variety of religious artistic expression in the history of Christianity. Early Christian churches were often enriched with fresco paintings and mosaics; elaborate interior and exterior sculptural programs characterize the medieval Romanesque and Gothic styles; stained glass windows play a prominent role in the Gothic era; statues and paintings are generally typical of Roman Catholic churches; icons (often in multi-tiered presentation on an iconostasis—icon screen) abound in Orthodox churches; and minimal and often austere decorations (sometimes only a plain



Figure 10.6 Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, France, 1955. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

cross—lacking the figure of Jesus) may characterize the art associated with specific Protestant denominations.

Just as the forms of art vary widely, so do the forms of worship services that take place within Christian churches. Some branches of Christianity have very elaborate and traditional rites involving the enactment of highly structured rituals that may be performed only by specially trained and authorized figures. Although most all Christian liturgy (from the Greek *leitourgia*, "work of the people") is communal and congregational, the roles of the public congregants and the appointed leaders who preside at these rituals vary widely. This is well reflected by the variety of interior furnishings that may be found in Christian churches.

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox liturgies, for example, focus on the sacrament of Communion and the miraculous "transubstantiation" of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ. These sacred mysteries are celebrated at the church altar, led by those trained and authorized to do so, and the congregants are then invited to come forward and partake of these blessings in an orderly and pious fashion. In many Eastern Orthodox churches, the high altar itself is hidden from public view (customarily by a large screen of icons—separating the "most holy" space of the altar from the "holy" space of the church itself), and the congregants do not themselves witness the sacred rites in which they may later be invited to partake via Communion. Protestant Christian groups in general tend to regard the rites of Communion as extremely

significant also, but primarily in their purely symbolic and faith-affirming nature as remembrances of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, the interior spaces of Protestant churches may place far less emphasis on a prominently positioned church altar and rather more emphasis on a pulpit or podium from which scriptural readings and sermons may be delivered. The importance of the rite of adult baptism (by partial or full immersion) is reflected by the interior accouterments of many Baptist churches, and the importance of personal faith and healing testimonials is reflected in Christian Science churches often by the arrangement of prominent and dual podiums from which church leaders may encourage speakers to describe their healing experiences.

EXAMPLES

Religious imagery plays a prominent role in the history of Christianity. Images of holy figures (such as Jesus, Mary, the apostles, and saintly martyrs) and scenes depicting episodes from their lives have been created through the centuries in a variety of styles and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, the production of visual and figurative imagery in the service of the Christian religion (for teaching or devotional purposes) has been a source of intense discussion up to the present day. Some Protestant branches of Christianity eschew the use of visual/narrative imagery altogether, whereas the Catholic and Orthodox traditions have traditionally made maximal use of figural art for worship-directed practices. The following selections have been chosen to demonstrate the richness and diversity of Christian imagery as well as the changes in style and interpretation represented by different time periods. With literally thousands of examples to choose from, the following selections are simply a small sample focusing on depictions of the key figures and events in the Christian religion.

Three Images of Mary and Jesus

These three images represent quite different interpretations of the same subject matter: Mary and the infant Jesus. They are vastly different in style, format, and technique. Their differences not only reflect their art historical contexts but also can be seen as significant reflections of important theological issues concerning the role and position of Mary and her relationship to Jesus.

The earliest image is a Byzantine icon that was produced, probably in the city of Constantinople, in the late sixth century (see Figure 10.7). This particular icon is one of the rare survivals from the early Byzantine period; it was produced before the Iconoclastic Controversy. It was created in encaustic (colored wax pigments) on a wooden panel. The second example (the *Madonna of Vladimir*) is also a Byzantine icon (see Figure 10.8). It was created in Constantinople in the late 11th or early 12th century. This later image was produced long after the period of Iconoclastic Controversy in the Byzantine world. It was created with egg tempera paint on a wooden panel.[16]



Figure 10.7 *Virgin and Child with Saints*, late sixth century. Mount Sinai, Egypt: Monastery of Saint Catherine. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 10.8 *Madonna of Vladimir*, early 12th century. Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

The third example was also painted with egg tempera on a wooden panel. It was created ca. 1465–67 during the Italian Renaissance period by the artist Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–69) (see Figure 10.9).

Comparing these three similar images is extremely useful in tracking the changes in, and diversity represented by, Christian art forms from different historical and style periods. Although all of the works primarily focus the viewer's attention on the holy figures themselves, there are many notable differences between the three images. The early icon depicts Mary seated on a chair, facing forward, holding the infant Jesus on her lap. Mary and Jesus are flanked by two saintly figures on either side, and two heavenward-looking angels appear behind them. The composition is extremely symmetrical and formal in appearance. The infant Jesus and the two saints (traditionally identified as Saints Theodore and George—both later saints who lived long after the time of Mary and Jesus) all stare straight out at the viewer. Mary gazes slightly off to the right. All of the figures appear solemn and serious. The viewer thus sees that this is a significant and formal work of art, whose intention was to convey the theological importance of these sacred figures. Mary, at the center of the composition, is shown



Figure 10.9 Fra Filippo Lippi, *Madonna with Child and Two Angels*, ca. 1465–67. Florence: Uffizi Gallery. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

as the holy person who miraculously gave birth to the Son of God. She is the "God-bearer" (or *Theotokos*)—a title that she formally received in the preceding century at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Jesus is the God-being seated on her lap whom she presents to the viewer but with whom she otherwise demonstrates little interaction or motherly affection.

The later Byzantine icon (the *Madonna of Vladimir*) shows a quite different level of interaction between Mary and Jesus. In contrast to the frontal formality of the earlier image, this later icon depicts the infant Jesus snuggling up to his mother's cheek while she tenderly supports him on her arm. This icon has been frequently restored and over-painted so that only the faces of Mary and Jesus are close to their original appearance. The disproportionate body of the infant Jesus and the dramatic gold highlighting on his garment are largely the result of later additions. This panel was given as a gift by the Patriarch of Constantinople to the Grand Duke of Kiev in Russia in the early 12th century and ultimately was taken to the city of Vladimir (hence its name). Believed to be a wonder-working image, it was taken to Moscow in the late 14th century and, according to tradition, protected the city of Moscow from Mongol invasions of the time. The image was employed in such a capacity at several later periods in Russian history as well. The *Theotokos* (Mary) is seen as the holy protectress of Russia.

This icon presents a much more maternal and loving relationship between the two holy figures than the earlier pre-iconoclastic version. This type, known in Greek as the *Eleousa* and in Russian as *Umoleniye* ("merciful" or "loving kindness"), developed in the post-iconoclastic period as a reflection of continued theological discussions about the position of Mary and the divine/human nature of Jesus. A comparison between the two panels also indicates significant changes in art style; the works "were surely made in worlds with different expectations regarding what a representation was and what effect it was expected to create."[17]

> The desire to represent the visible nature of Christ resulted in the emphasis on his human aspect, and the representation of the human nature is necessarily tied to the miracle of the incarnation through the Virgin Mary. Her human qualities rather than her utility as a source of doctrine had to be brought out directly, and emphasizing her motherhood was the most obvious means of achieving this.[18]

In images of this later type (and numerous variations exist in Byzantine and Russian art on the overall theme of Mary and the infant Jesus[19]), the emphasis is on the emotional relationship between the two figures. Warmth, tenderness, mercy, and sorrow combine in Mary's expression of motherly care and compassion for her son and his ultimate sacrificial and redemptive role. Although intense emotion and powerful spiritual messages are conveyed in images of this sort, all icons generally adhere to strict guidelines and traditions of image and presentation format. The figures are meant to be seen as holy and sacred, existing in a spiritual rather than earthly realm.[20]

This poses a great contrast to the depiction of the *Madonna with Child and Two Angels* created by the Italian Renaissance artist Fra Filippo Lippi, in the mid-15th century. In contrast to the frontal formality and expressive stylization of the Byzantine icons, Lippi's image shows a very worldly Madonna, elegantly dressed in the finest Florentine fashion of the day. She is seated on an elaborate chair in front of a window through which a detailed landscape can be seen. The infant Jesus is presented here as a plump child who reaches out to touch his mother's shoulder. He is supported by a mischievous-looking angel who smiles out at the viewer. Another angel can be glimpsed behind the main figures. Although some traditional religious symbolism can be seen in this work—Mary and Jesus both have thin golden haloes over their heads (indicating their holiness), and the prominent pearl on Mary's headdress as well as the coastline and water in the far distance may refer to theological commentaries describing Jesus as the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46) and Mary as the "star of the sea"—the overall impression of this work bespeaks the artist's "enthusiasm for the beauties of light and atmosphere, rocks and fruitful plains, cities and soft cloud masses, lovely young women and healthy babies, tasteful garments and splendid furnishings."[21] Indeed, the holy figures here appear to have specific portrait-like qualities, as if they are representations of actual people known by the artist, painted from life. This may in fact be the case.[22]

In any event, Lippi's Madonna typifies, in many ways, the humanization of sacred subject matter and the interest in earthly realism characteristic of the Renaissance period in Western art. "Renaissance" means "re-birth" and is used to describe the interests of post-medieval writers and artists in the works of literature, philosophy, and art from ancient Greece and Rome. At the same time, the continued dominance of the Christian religion inspired artists and writers of the Renaissance period to create works that convey and reinforce Christian themes in a classically styled manner. Lippi's work certainly exemplifies these trends and is worlds apart from the earlier examples—although the artistic subject is the same.

Three Images of the Crucifixion of Jesus

Although the death and resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental aspect of the Christian belief system, images of the crucifixion of Jesus have varied greatly

through the ages. The death of Jesus on the cross, his subsequent return to life, and the importance this holds for all Christian believers have been interpreted and depicted variously through the centuries. Nevertheless, the crucifixion of Jesus was not one of the very first subjects depicted in Christian art. Although crosses are found in early Christian art, the subject of the crucifixion itself appears to have been avoided at first. A number of scholars have speculated that this may have been because early Christians preferred to focus on Jesus's victory over death rather than on his torture and disgraceful public execution as a criminal in the Roman Empire. When crucifixion was outlawed in the Roman Empire under the emperor Constantine, the image of Jesus's death on the cross gradually entered the pictorial vocabulary of Christian imagery and has evolved with different emphases ever since.

The early fifth-century ivory plaque illustrated shows one of the very earliest images of the crucifixion[23] (see Figure 10.10). It was probably made in Rome and is a small work measuring about three by four inches. It is one of four panels (now separated) that originally must have formed the sides of a small box, or "casket." The exact function of these small decorated caskets is unknown; perhaps they were used to hold relics or other holy objects. Each of the four plaques contains one or two narrative scenes carved in relief. These include



Figure 10.10 Ivory plaque with the Crucifixion, ca. 420–430. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

Pilate washing his hands, Jesus carrying the cross, the Marys and angel at the empty tomb, and doubting Thomas. The scene of the suicide of Judas and the crucifixion of Jesus appear together on one panel. The other figures represented as present at the crucifixion are Mary and Saint John (to the left) and Longinus (the Roman soldier who pierced the body of Jesus with his spear). The inscription above the head of Jesus reads REX IUD (AEORUM), meaning "King of the Jews."

Taken as a whole, the subjects shown on the casket provide a succinct pictorial narrative of the events in the final days of the life of Jesus, his death, and his resurrection. His death, however, is definitely de-emphasized. Although the figure of Judas is clearly shown dead—with closed eyes and lifeless body hanging from the tree—Jesus is depicted as vigorous, muscular, and alert. His eyes are open, and he seems to be standing upright on or in front of the cross, rather than hanging from it. His pose, outstretched arms, and facial expression give no indication of pain or suffering. Jesus is depicted as triumphant over death, a message that is repeated in the vignette of the mother bird feeding her chicks in a nest—found in the tree branch bending toward the body of Jesus. "The first Christians wished to emphasize that Christ was risen, that is, he had overcome death and conquered evil. He would come again to judge the living and the dead. This was what mattered to them."[24] This early depiction of the crucifixion and the related scenes on the other ivory panels certainly well emphasize these themes.

A vastly different image of the crucifixion was created many centuries later by the German painter Matthias Grünewald (ca. 1475/80–1528) (see Plate 20). The central panel of his complex and multifaceted work, *The Isenheim Altarpiece* (ca. 1510–15), depicts a scene of extreme horror. The physical suffering of Jesus on the cross is conveyed in detail. His body is covered with sores; blood pours from his side and from the wounds of the nails in his twisted feet and hands. His arms pull from their sockets with the weight of his slumping body, which also pulls down the top bar of the cross. His face falls forward; his mouth is open, and his eyes are closed. The dead Jesus, placed in the center of the composition against a dark landscape background, is accompanied by the mourning figures of Saint John and Mary (who is shown collapsing with grief), the kneeling figure of Mary Magdalene convulsed in anguish at the foot of the cross, and the figure of Saint John the Baptist holding a book and pointing at Jesus. The Latin inscription next to John reads, "He must increase but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John the Baptist had announced the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, the sacrificial Lamb of God, which theme is also amplified by the small cross-bearing lamb bleeding into a chalice at John's feet.

Much has transpired in Christian imagery and history since the early ivory plaque was created, reflective of continued theological discussion regarding the human and divine aspects of Jesus. Images of the crucifixion that show Jesus clearly dead or dying began to appear during the early medieval period and became more common and accepted by the 10th and 11th centuries in

both Western Europe and the Eastern Byzantine realms. Also during the Middle Ages, a number of new artistic themes developed, many based on a growing body of mystical and visionary literature. Images such as the *Pietà* (Pity, Mary holding the dead body of Jesus), the *Man of Sorrows* (Jesus wounded and suffering), the *Arma Christi* (Instruments of the Passion), and other devotional images designed to inspire a deeply emotional response from viewers became highly popular, especially in northern Europe.[25]

Grünewald's well-studied work needs to be understood within this overall context as well as within the particular circumstances for which it was created.[26] Commissioned by the monastic order of Saint Anthony in Isenheim, the altarpiece was designed to be placed in a chapel connected to the hospital run by the Antonines. Among the sick cared for were

> particularly those afflicted with St. Anthony's fire or ergotism, a disease causing horrific lesions and eruptions of the skin. A new patient was brought first before the altarpiece in the chapel in the hope of a cure through direct divine intervention. If such a miracle did not occur, the patient at least had the consolation of knowing that Christ's sufferings were like his.[27]

The side panels on the front of the altarpiece depict two other figures who suffered greatly but who ultimately triumphed: Saint Sebastian (an early Christian martyr who was tortured by being shot full of arrows—often invoked against the plague and other diseases) and Saint Anthony himself (the patron of the order—whose torments by demons are vividly recounted in stories of his life and graphically depicted on an inner panel of the altarpiece). The altarpiece is a polyptych with multiple hinged panels. Grünewald's work continues on successive openings with scenes including the Annunciation, the Madonna and Child, episodes in the lives of Saints Anthony and Paul the Hermit, and a brilliant image of the resurrection that shows Jesus rising from his tomb with a fully healed and glowing body. It is a highly complex work, an excellent example of the evolution and changes in Christian imagery as well as a special testimony to the needs and concerns of its time.

The crucifixion, one of the most frequent images in Christian art, has been depicted in all centuries and continues to provide a powerful motif for modern and contemporary artists. In the 20th century, the French painter Georges Rouault (1871–1958) produced several versions of the subject (see Figure 10.11). He became a devout Catholic, and his early training as a stained glass artist may be reflected in his unique style characterized by dark black outlines and glowing patches of color. Rouault's style is akin to, but also diverges from, the early 20th-century art movements with which he is sometimes associated, such as Fauvism and Expressionism. Like many of his contemporaries, Rouault worked in an abstract style while maintaining an interest in the representation of recognizable imagery. He was a highly prolific artist whose subjects ranged widely; however, religious imagery was always extremely important to him. He once

said, "Art, the art that I aspire to, will be the most profound, the most complete, the most moving expression of what man feels when he finds himself face to face with himself and his humanity. Art should be a . . . passionate confession, the translation of the inner life."[28]

In his *Christ on the Cross* (1939), the traditional elements of the subject are present. The enlarged figure of Jesus on the cross dominates the center of the composition; the accompanying figures of Mary and John appear to the right side of the cross, and Mary Magdalene kneels to the left. Minimal landscape details are indicated, and the figures are quite simplified, consisting of carefully rendered color patches encased in Rouault's typically broad black outlines. Although he has followed the traditional iconography of the crucifixion, Rouault's rendition is a highly personal expression as well. We sense that the artist's own feelings inspired this work. "This is not just a painting for public art, to be viewed from afar. It is the artist's deeply felt personal response to the Crucifixion which in turn seems to require a personal response from the viewer."[29]



Figure 10.11 Georges Rouault, *Christ on the Cross*, 1939. Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne. CNAC/MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

This brief selection of crucifixion imagery—from the early Christian period, through the northern Renaissance, and to the 20th century—indicates how this most-important event for Christianity has been continually reinterpreted by visual artists through the ages. It remains, regardless of style, format, and artistic interpretation, one of the most recognizable and distinctive of Christian images.

NOTES

1. The "synoptic gospels" (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) present similar versions of Jesus's life, through they are organized somewhat differently. The Gospel of John focuses less on the biography of Jesus and devotes more attention to theological issues and Jesus's position as the Son of God. In addition to the four canonical gospels, many other early writings, collectively known as the New Testament Apocrypha (from the Greek *apokryphos*—hidden), were composed during the early centuries of Christianity. "Although the New Testament canon was established in the late fourth century, subject matter from apocryphal writings, frequent in early Christian art, continued to play an important role in Christian iconography and literature . . . A great many subjects which

were extremely popular in medieval [and later] art are based on apocryphal writings and later literary and hagiographic elaborations of these tales." Leslie Ross, *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 20.

2. Rosemary Drage Hale, "Christianity," in *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions*, ed. Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 75.

3. Hale, 59.

4. Hale, 60.

5. Hale, 63.

6. Hale, 63.

7. Alan Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

8. Hale, 84.

9. Albert Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 231–32.

10. Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985).

11. Hale, 77.

12. Caecilia Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art 300–1150: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 48.

13. For an extensive selection of texts, see Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), especially 149–77.

14. Conrad Rudolph, *The "Things of Greater Importance:" Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

15. Leslie Ross, *Artists of the Middle Ages* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 81–92.

16. For an excellent introduction to the materials and techniques of icon painting, see Guillem Ramos-Poqui, *The Technique of Icon Painting* (Tunbridge Wells, England: Search Press/Burns and Oates, 1990). For the use of icons in the Orthodox liturgy, see Nancy Sevcenko, "Icons in the Liturgy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 45–57.

17. Jeffrey Anderson, "The Byzantine Panel Portrait Before and After Iconoclasm," in *The Sacred Image: East and West,* ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 30.

18. Ioli Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became 'Meter Theou,'" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), 169.

19. Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images—Sixth to Fourteenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1978).

20. Ross, *Artists of the Middle Ages*, 123–37.

21. Frederick Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 224.

22. Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 9–13, 150.

23. This work is traditionally described as *the* earliest extant image of the crucifixion, dating to ca. 420–30. The carved wooden doors of the church of Santa Sabina in Rome (dating ca. 432) also contain a very early image of the crucifixion.

24. Richard Harries, *The Passion in Art* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 13.
25. Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion: 1300–1500* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1994).
26. Andrée Hayum, *The Isenheim Altarpiece: God's Medicine and the Painter's Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), and Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Devil at Isenheim: Reflections of Popular Belief in Grünewald's Altarpiece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
27. Harries, 94.
28. Harries, 115.
29. Harries, 117.

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—11—

Islam

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

The religion of Islam is the youngest of the three major monotheistic religious systems popular in the world today and also the fastest growing of the world religions. Closely related to Judaism and Christianity by sharing a belief in one God, Islam expands on aspects of the earlier two systems by its acceptance of the culminating revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE). Islam acknowledges the sacred nature of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and accepts figures such as Moses and Jesus as inspired prophets of God. According to Islam, however, Muhammad was the final prophet whose revelations and teachings complete and supersede all earlier. Muhammad is regarded as the "seal" of the prophets, and his message represents a return to the one, true religion, as originally revealed to the first man, Adam, and the ancient biblical patriarch Abraham (Ibrahim). Muslims trace their heritage to the common "Abrahamic tradition" of Jews and Christians, but believe that Muhammad's message represents the final renewal of this tradition.

Muhammad (Muhammad ibn Abdallah) was born in the city of Mecca in present-day Saudi Arabia. He was a merchant and a member of an important tribe. Circa 610, when he was about 40 years old, he began to have mystical experiences that continued throughout the rest of his life. These divine revelations led him to proclaim that there was one God only (Allah) and that the traditional polytheistic beliefs previously held by the Arabian tribal groups were idolatrous. The religious beliefs of the society into which Muhammad was

born involved worship of a number of different major and minor deities. His proclamation of the one God was thus extremely controversial and originally met with great opposition. Nevertheless, the strength of his message impressed many, and he quickly gained followers who accompanied him to the city of Yathrib (later named Medina—Madinat al-Nabi—the City of the Prophet) in 622. This exodus/emigration from Mecca to Medina is known, in Arabic, as the Hegira (or Hijra), and it marks the first year of the Muslim calendar, as well as the formal founding of the Islamic community, or *Umma.* For the next decade, Muhammad continued his teachings and gained many followers. He returned to Mecca with a military force in 630, captured the city, and proclaimed the end of idol worship. By the time of his death in Medina in 632, most of the Arabian peninsula was under his military and religious control, and his successors continued to expand this empire rapidly by political conquest and conversion.

After the death of Muhammad, disputes arose regarding the leadership of the Muslim community, and it is to this early period that the two major divisions still found within Islam today can ultimately be traced. The majority of Muslims in the world today follow the Sunni branch. Sunni refers to *sunna* ("tradition"), and Sunni Muslims are "the people of the tradition." Although the Sunni movement did not formally arise until the 10th century, it can be seen as the ultimate result of doctrinal disputes and political rivalries of the first several decades after the death of Muhammad and, in particular, the claims of the Shi'ite sect to overarching legitimacy and authority.

The Shi'ite movement opposed the election of Abu Bakr al-Asamm (leader from 632 to 634), a close companion of Muhammad, as the first caliph ("deputy" or "successor" of Muhammad) and believed that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib (caliph from 656 to 661), should have been chosen instead as the rightful leader and spiritual guide, or *imam.* The term Shi'ite comes from Shi'at Ali, the "partisans" or "followers" of Ali. Although Ali did ultimately become the fourth caliph, the divisions over rightful succession and correct lineage of the leaders resulted in military uprisings and conflicts that continue to occur in the Islamic world today.

In addition, the Shi'ite movement itself divided into two major branches in the eighth and ninth centuries, over similar issues. Ismaili Shi'ism (which itself contains many subsects) arose with the supporters of Ismail as the seventh Imam, and Ismailis "believe in an unbroken line of Imams to the present day."[1] "Twelver" Shi'ism maintains a belief in the return, at the end of time, of a "hidden" twelfth Imam who disappeared in the late ninth century into "a miraculous state of concealment . . . 'occultation.'"[2] In Shi'ite traditions, the Imams are divinely inspired spiritual leaders who must be direct descendants of the Prophet (through Ali and Muhammad's daughter, Fatima). The Imam "is a link in the chain of prophecy stretching back through Muhammad and Jesus to Abraham and Adam. . . . The Imam, therefore, is the only legitimate authority on earth, and obedience to him is required of all humankind. He is held to be

infallible, without sin, and in possession of a body of knowledge transmitted by God."[3]

Sunni Muslims, "while thinking of themselves as members of the single worldwide community of Islam . . . recognize internal social and cultural differences born of the encounter between Islamic teaching and local and regional practices."[4] Thus, Sunni Muslims themselves represent a vast diversity of groups in different geographic settings and cultures. Shi'ism, with a greater emphasis on clerical authority and more narrowly defined doctrines, is followed by only 10 percent of Muslims today; the vast majority of Muslims are Sunnis. It was primarily within Sunni traditions that the four major schools of Islamic law (the Sharia) developed in the eighth and ninth centuries, with a series of scholars who devoted attention to codifying rules for proper conduct according to Islamic principles. These different schools of legal study and interpretation are still followed in the Islamic world today.

The initial growth of Islam was primarily among Arabic peoples, but in the centuries following, "Arabs were joined by large numbers of people from other ethnic and religious backgrounds . . . [and] in this way, Islam was transformed from the religion of a relatively small number of Arabs to a universal faith."[5] One can trace this growth through a series of eras associated with different dynasties of rulers: the Umayyads in the Middle East and Spain, the Abbasids in Iraq, the Fatimids in Egypt, the Seljuk Turks in Central Asia and Anatolia, the Mongol Ilkanids in Central Asia and Persia, the Timurids in Persia, the Ottomans based in Anatolia, the Safavids in Persia, and the Moghuls in India. In all cases, the art and architecture associated with these different eras and peoples represent a great cultural diversity. Islam continues to flourish and grow rapidly around the world today. Thus, it is extremely wise to recognize that the historical development and present nature of Islam involve a plethora of Islamic cultures rather than a faith based on one sole religious leader or political authority. All Muslims, however, share some fundamental beliefs and key practices.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

"There is no God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet." This statement, known as the *shahada* ("confession" or "witnessing"), contains the two fundamental beliefs that provide the foundation for Islam. Islam is an Arabic word that means "submission" or "surrender" to the will of God, and the followers of Islam are called Muslims—those who "submit" or "surrender" to God. "To submit to the divine will . . . is . . . to bring about a harmonious order in the universe. In this sense, Islam refers not only to the act of submission but to its consequence, that is, peace (*salam.*)"[6] Muslims do not worship Muhammad but regard him as the Prophet of God, through whom God spoke.

The sacred scriptures for Islam are known as the Qur'an, or "recitation," and consist of a series of revelations received by Muhammad beginning in ca. 610

when he had the mystical experience of first being visited by the angel Gabriel, who told him to "recite" the words from God. This was followed by many further mystical revelations through the rest of his life. The text of the Qur'an was dictated by Muhammad to several scribes during his lifetime and is also based on slightly later memories of his teachings. The final and authorized version of the Qur'an was created within 20 years of Muhammad's death and remains unchanged today. Because the Qur'an was received and written in the Arabic language, translations into other languages are not considered truly authentic or authoritative. The subsequent importance of the Arabic language and script for Islamic art is discussed later in this chapter.

The Qur'an is a complex and poetic text (about the same length as the New Testament/Christian scriptures) filled with narratives, metaphors, mystical expressions, and directions for specific duties and moral obligations. Chief among these latter are the "Five Pillars" of Islam. These are (1) confession of faith in the one God, Allah, and Muhammad's role as Prophet, (2) prayer five times daily, (3) charity to the poor in terms of specific tithes/taxes, (4) fasting from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan, and (5) making a pilgrimage (or Hajj) to Mecca at least once during one's life, if one is able (and preferably at the designated period for this). The focal point of the pilgrimage to Mecca is the visit to the Ka'ba. This is an ancient sacred structure in the form of a cube-shaped building—presently about 43 feet tall. Tradition holds that the Ka'ba was first constructed by Adam, rebuilt by Abraham, and purified by Muhammad when he rid Mecca of idol worship.[7]

In addition to the Qur'an, the other sacred scriptures of Islam are known as the Hadith. This is a vast compendium of material that includes sayings of the Prophet as well as information and anecdotes about his life and deeds. The Hadith, originally transmitted purely orally, were primarily collected and compiled in the late eighth and ninth centuries. They trace their transmission back to authoritative sources such as close companions and family members of the Prophet, but in some cases may also be seen as reflecting later interpretations of doctrine.

The Qur'an and the Hadith are the foundational and most revered texts of Islam, and these works provide the basis for the Sharia (the "Islamic way")—codes of contact, social, and legal obligations. Reflections on these foundational works by Islamic writers through the eras have also resulted in a vast body of theological and mystical literature, which may be categorized under the general term of Sufism. "The term may perhaps derive from the Arabic *suf* ('wool'), and thus is perhaps a reference to the rough, simple garb worn by ascetics in the formative period of Islam."[8] Although Sufism is often described as the "mystical branch" of Islam, in many ways, Sufism "should be seen as an integral dimension of Islamic life rather than as something pursued apart from the mainstream practices and doctrines of the tradition."[9] Through the centuries and in different Islamic cultures, Sufi teachers and movements have been responsible for remarkable works of devotional literature and art.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Definitions and Dilemmas

The focus of this study is on Islamic religious art and not on the vast and multifaceted field of Islamic art in general.[10] However, the terms Islamic art, Islamic religious art, and even religious art are, as a whole, all extremely problematic. Because Islam itself represents many coexisting variants, and because the extent and influence of Islam covers "not just one period and one country but fourteen centuries in nearly forty countries,"[11] it is wise to acknowledge the dangers and difficulties inherent in a "religiously based classification"[12] for this vastness and diversity of material.

Indeed, much scholarship has been devoted to the complex issues of defining what is Islamic about Islamic art or to posing questions such as this: "What is one meant to attend to in Islamic art?"[13] It can be said that many of the copious studies of Islamic art include works of art that are, arguably, not specifically religious in nature. Many works of a secular nature—objects and architecture designed for nonreligious, domestic purposes—are often included in studies of Islamic art. Are works of art Islamic simply because they were produced for Muslim patrons, or in regions of the world where Islam was, or is, the dominant faith? Is it the case that "the art of Islam is Islamic art not only because it was created by Muslims but because it issues forth from the Islamic revelation"?[14]

There are no simple answers to these questions, and the definition of Islamic art remains an intriguing matter of intense scholarly debate. This dilemma also brings up "a key issue of contemporary thought: whether it is valid to apply the same investigative methods to the art of all cultures, or whether the very nature of artistic experience requires methods created by the culture itself."[15] Again, opinions on this diverge widely. Whereas some scholars have claimed that Islamic art requires "specific rules in order to be understood,"[16] others have argued that this attitude creates a dangerous "mystification"[17] of the topic.

In addition, one of the issues that needs to be addressed immediately in any discussion of Islamic religious art (or Islamic art in general) regards the attitude of Islam to the arts, the figurative arts in particular. Many religions place great emphasis on narrative imagery and make use of two- and three-dimensional images for didactic and inspirational purposes. Deities are often pictured in human or human-like forms in many religious art traditions. Stories from the lives and deeds of saintly figures feature prominently in some traditions, and images may function and be understood as containers or sacred receptacles for divine presences. In some religious traditions, holy images are housed within shrines or temples, and these images are objects of intense veneration in the form of prayers, ceremonies, and offerings. The images may be taken out and processed in special religious festival contexts and otherwise may not only serve as reminders of divine presence but may also be understood *as* divine presences.

The worship of a multitude of different deities, and the use of imagery to visualize and embody a number of deities, was characteristic of some of the religious practices of pre-Islamic Arabia before the time of Muhammad. By his lifetime in the sixth century, of course, the traditions of Christian art and iconography had significantly developed, and Jewish art forms had continued to evolve. Figural and narrative scenes involving representations of humans and animals had played a greater or lesser role in both Jewish and Christian art for centuries by the time of Muhammad. Muhammad's message of the oneness of God (Allah) posed a sharp contrast to any polytheistic beliefs and practices and reconfirmed the monotheistic message of both Judaism and Christianity. The belief in one single all-powerful God required that the worship practices and imagery associated with polytheism be rejected in favor of submission to the one, true God. The creation, use, and worship of images of deities was seen as indicative of the misguided polytheism of pre-Islamic times, which was supplanted by the message and revelations of Muhammad.

There are, however, no specific strictures against art in general in the Qur'an itself, although the text does emphasize and reassert the evilness of idol worship following the Hebrew and Christian scriptures on this matter. The blasphemy represented by the worship of false gods and idols was dramatically signaled by Muhammad's reported actions when he overtook the city of Mecca in 630. According to several accounts, one of his first actions upon his return to Mecca was to order the destruction of all idols in the city, many of which were housed near or inside the Ka'ba—"the most important ritual site of the nomadic tribes that inhabited Arabia, [originally] built at God's express command by Abraham and Ismael, according to Islam."[18] By the time of Muhammad,

> there were said to be 360 different deities including Awf, the great bird, Hubal, the Nabatean god, the three celestial goddesses, Manal, Al-Uzza and al-Lat, and statues of Mary and Jesus. The most important of all these deities was called Allah ('god'). This deity was worshiped throughout southern Syria and northern Arabia, and was the only deity not represented by an idol in the ka'ba.[19]

All the pagan idols were destroyed, "with the notable exception of the statues of Mary and Jesus . . . Thus, by gaining both religious and political control over Mecca, Muhammad was able to redefine the sacred territory and restore Abrahamic order to it."[20]

Although it is certainly possible to interpret this act of idol-smashing as an act of iconoclasm—and iconoclastic tendencies certainly do exist and have repeatedly surfaced in the history of Islam (as in Christianity, Judaism, and other world religions as well)—the destruction of the idols was most primarily a reflection of Muhammad's wish to rid the city of pagan religions and have his followers turn to the one true God: Allah.

Other more specific statements concerning art can be found among the Hadith traditions (the sayings of Muhammad as later recorded or remembered

by his companions), and several of these statements have been interpreted as representing a negative attitude toward figural art in general. For example, several Hadiths say that those who attempt to imitate what God has created, or those who attempt to imitate God by creating representations of living beings, will be punished on the day of judgment. However, it seems clear that, even from the very earliest era, the target of concern was not art per se but rather idolatrous art created for the worship of false gods.

This is borne out by the fact that figural and narrative imagery *are* found in Islamic art and even in art of an intensely religious nature. Although it has been convenient for many who have written about Islamic art in the past to draw a distinction between "secular" art (where it is clear that figural images appear from the very earliest periods) and "religious" art (where "prohibitions" upon or at least avoidance of figural imagery appear to have been in place from the earliest periods), the situation is not as simple and clear cut as this implies. "Figural representation has always been a part of secular art in the Islamic world,"[21] and in some cases—notably later Persian manuscripts illustrated with images of the Prophet and scenes from his life—figural imagery also plays an important role in reflecting the political and religious aims of different eras.[22] It is certainly a mistake to characterize Islamic art as anti-figural or to regard figurative art, when it does appear, "as an aberration within a strictly aniconic culture."[23] Nevertheless, there is no doubt at all that Islamic art, in general, makes highly sophisticated use of patterns—geometric, vegetal, and calligraphic—and these patterns play a dominant role in both the religious and the secular arts characteristic of a diversity of periods and Islamic cultures.

The Mosque

In terms of religious architecture, the mosque is the fundamental form of gathering space designed to suit the specific needs of Muslim worship. "As a type, the mosque is ubiquitous, and at once old and very new. It is a culture-bound place of worship, representing local and regional traditions, and a trans- or supra-regional expression of . . . a pan-Islamic worldwide character."[24] The principal function of mosques is to accommodate groups of believers who may gather in prayer at the five specified times daily. The term mosque (or *masjid*) derives from the Arabic word meaning "to prostrate oneself." Thus, a mosque is a "place or worship" and specifically a "place of prostration." Muslims may perform their daily prayers alone and in whatever areas or spaces are convenient for them, but the communal gathering in a mosque is especially important in some Islamic cultures—and especially on Friday (the Islamic holy day), Muslims are encouraged to attend communal prayer services and listen to teachings and sermons (*khutba*) at a mosque. Traditionally, men and women are afforded separate spaces for prayer in mosques, although variations exist, especially in current practices.

Depending on the time period and cultural context, the architectural forms and styles of Islamic mosques vary widely. All mosques, however, share specific

requirements. Chief among these is orientation. All Islamic mosques worldwide are oriented as closely as possible to the direction of the holy city of Mecca. All Muslims throughout the world pray in the direction of Mecca and perform their prayers (*salat*—by a series of formalized physical movements and gestures, involving standing, kneeling and prostration, plus the recitation of specific phrases) in the direction of the *qibla* (the wall of the mosque that is oriented to Mecca) and the *mihrab* (a niche in the *qibla* wall). A *qibla* and *mihrab* are thus among the requirements for Islamic religious architecture. In addition, most mosques are equipped with a *minbar* (often located next to the *mihrab*), which is an elevated platform or podium from which the prayer leader (*imam*) may deliver a sermon. Large mosques may also include a *dikka* (raised platform) from which the speeches of the *imam* may be re-conveyed to the congregants. Because ritual preparation for prayer requires cleansing and washing of head, feet, and hands, mosques are customarily provided with fountains or other ablution areas for worshipers. Towers (or minarets) are often a customary aspect of mosque architecture, but are by no means a universal feature.[25] They exist in a wide variety of styles, some characteristic of particular regions. The minarets may not only signal the location of the mosque but may also provide the location from which the formalized call to daily prayers (*adhan*) can be conveyed or broadcast by the *muezzin* (a specially trained and appointed person) or—in modern times—often a taped broadcast through loudspeakers).

Within these basic parameters of function and requirements, mosque architecture and style vary widely depending on the historical time period and world region (see Figure 11.1). The form and style of mosques may also depend on their status as smaller community mosques constructed for local audiences or as grander and perhaps royal or state-sponsored mosques with connections to political authority in some manner. Some mosques enclose more space than others, a factor that also depends on climate conditions.

In some case, mosques will show a hypostyle (or multi-columned hall) arrangement preceded by an open-air courtyard or *sahn*. Some of the very ear-

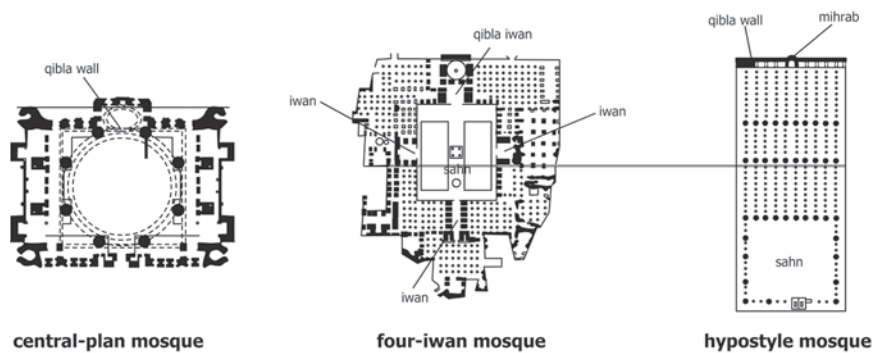


Figure 11.1 Mosque floor plans—general types. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.

liest mosques are of this type, such as the Great Mosque in Cordoba, Spain, constructed beginning in the late eighth century under the Umayyad rulers (see Figure 11.2). This building was enlarged several times in the 9th and 10th centuries and ultimately became transformed via the insertion of a large Christian chapel in the midst of the former prayer hall in the 16th century. The prayer hall contains multiple rows of columns supporting horseshoe-shaped arches on superimposed levels. Red brick and white stonework add to the visual complexity and "startling originality"[26] of the large hypostyle interior space.

Other mosques are of central-plan format with an emphasis on a vast domed interior space. Courtyards may or may not appear in this type, which is especially characteristic of medieval Ottoman style, such as the "Blue Mosque" in Istanbul, constructed in the early 17th century under the Ottoman sultan Ahmed I (1590–1617). Six tall, slim minarets grace the exterior edges of this mosque complex, and the interior is famous for its thousands of glazed, patterned tiles of dominantly blue tones (see Figures 11.3 and 11.4).

A central courtyard surrounded on all four sides by vaulted halls with wide arched entrances (or *iwans*) is yet another format. The four-*iwan* plan was especially developed in medieval Persia, such as seen with the Royal Mosque (now the Imam Mosque), which was constructed under the patronage of the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas (1571–1629) in the early 17th century. The central courtyard



Figure 11.2 The Great Mosque, Cordoba, Spain, 8th to 10th century, interior. Art Resource, NY.



Figure 11.3 Blue Mosque (Mosque of Sultan Ahmed I), Istanbul, Turkey, 1609–16, exterior. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

contains a large, square pool of water that reflects the multiple small and large arches of the enclosure (see Figure 11.5).

Many contemporary mosques represent variations on these traditional historical formats while also demonstrating materials, elements, and styles of modern and postmodern architectural design. Apart from purely religious functions as centers for communal worship, Islamic mosques have traditionally also functioned as focal points in larger architectural complexes involving schools of Islamic law and theology (*madrasas*) plus hospitals and other facilities for charitable works. The Islamic mosque is often not a stand-alone religious building but incorporates these other functions too.

However, regardless of architectural style, date, and cultural context of Islamic mosques, the interior and exterior decoration of mosques rarely if ever shows any designs that include human figures. Strictly speaking, as mentioned previously, Islamic religious art does not include or permit the representation of human beings. This is a complex issue and has been understood and variously interpreted by different Islamic cultures through the centuries. However, the interior and exterior decoration of mosques is traditionally restricted to non-figural motifs and will primarily include geometric and calligraphic forms.

The Word in Islamic Art

The holy scriptures of Islam (the Qur'an) were received by and recited in the Arabic language to Muhammad, who transmitted the sacred words to his followers, in Arabic. Hence, Arabic is considered to be the holy language of Islam, and the careful transmission of the sacred scriptures, in written form, in the original Arabic, is one of the most important forms of Islamic art and religious devotion. Although it is surely the case that many other world religions regard their sacred texts as divinely inspired, and certainly the care and attention that adherents of other faiths devote to the correct copying and transmission of sacred scriptures can be seen to parallel that of Islam, the written word truly plays a quite distinctive role in Islamic art. Because of the dominant role of the written word in Islam, the art of calligraphy is one of the most stellar and most esteemed forms of Islamic art generally. In strictly religious contexts, such as manuscripts of the Qur'an and the decoration of mosques, where figural and narrative imagery are



Figure 11.4 Blue Mosque (Mosque of Sultan Ahmed I), Istanbul, Turkey, 1609–16, interior. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 11.5 Royal Mosque (Imam Mosque), Isfahan, Iran, 1612–37, interior courtyard. The Art Archive / Gianni Dagli Orti.

avoided, calligraphic inscriptions are certainly paramount in ways unparalleled in the religions arts of other cultures. Moreover, calligraphy appears in all media of Islamic art—it is not simply restricted to the obvious context of text transmission in manuscripts of the Qur'an, but appears in all forms of Islamic art from large to small scale, of both strictly religious and more secular forms.

Much scholarship has been devoted to the topic of the artful word in Islamic cultures and the "love of the written word that turned Islamic calligraphy into an elevated noble art."[27] It is traditionally explained "that calligraphy is so developed because of the absence of a representational tradition in Islamic art, because of theological difficulties in representation and because the Arabic language, and the Qur'an at the heart of it, is so significant in Islam."[28] The artistic evidence certainly demonstrates that artful writing is among the most ubiquitous forms of Islamic art.

The history of Islamic calligraphy and its use *in* art, and *as* art, is a lengthy and fascinating topic. Various styles of script developed in different Islamic cultures and these different styles can be recognized by their degrees of angularity and uprightness (such as the early and traditionally esteemed kufic script—which also has many variant forms) or by their rounded, slanting, and more cursive appearance (such as thuluth, naskhi, muhaqqaq, and numerous other styles of cursive script).[29] Sometimes different styles of script will be found on the same page in a manuscript or in close proximity on an architectural monument. In some periods and regions, the script styles were elaborated to a highly complex degree. Words and letter forms may be elongated, twisted, braided, overlaid, or enhanced with decorative extensions and geometric designs to the extent that textual legibility appears to be of relatively minor concern in favor of overall pattern, ornamental aesthetics, or mystical letter and word symbolism. Sometimes figural forms are created of text as well.



Figure 11.6 Qur'an Manuscript, 1307–08, from Baghdad; calligraphy by Ahmad ibn al-Suhrawardi al-Bakri. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

A page from an early 14th-century Qur'an created in Baghdad by the esteemed calligrapher Ahmad ibn-al-Suhrawardi al-Bakri includes sections of both kufic and muhaqqaq script (see Figure 11.6). The more angular kufic script appears in the upper and lower bands (reading, "Baghdad may Allah the Exalted honor it"), and the three lines of elegant cursive muhaqqaq script in the center of the page identify the artist "praising Allah and blessing His Prophet Muhammad."

A complex combination of script styles and layouts can be seen in the mosaic tile inscriptions on the dome of the Royal Mosque (Shah Mosque, now Imam Mosque) in Isfahan, Iran (see Figure 11.7). Created for the great art patron Shah Abbas in the early 17th century, cursive bands of thuluth-style script praise the Shah and the Safavid dynasty in the upper section of the dome's base (or drum), whereas lines of elongated ornamental kufic offer praises to Muhammad in the center of the drum, above geometric blocks of square kufic with inscriptions featuring statements such as "God is most mighty" and "Allah is God."

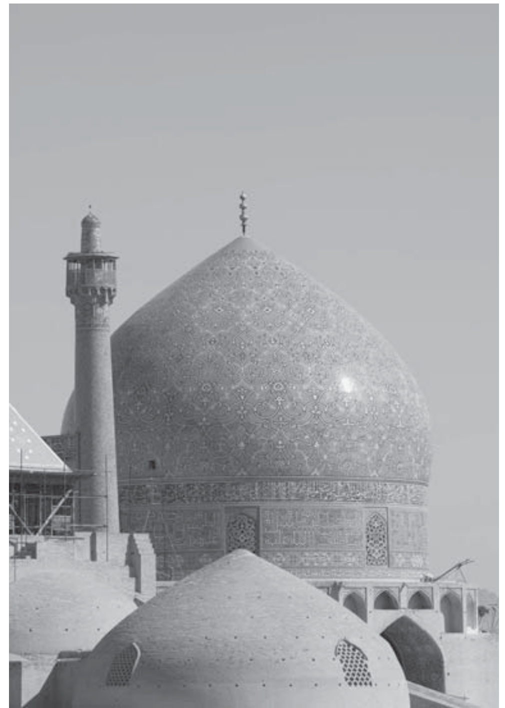


Figure 11.7 Royal Mosque (Imam Mosque), Isfahan, Iran, 1612–37, dome. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

EXAMPLES

The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, begun 691

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is certainly one of the most well-known, intensely studied, and frequently reproduced examples of Islamic architecture (see Figure 11.8 and Plate 21). It is one of the very first examples of Islamic architectural construction, and although it has been much restored through the centuries, it still stands today in a form that fundamentally retains its original appearance. It was constructed in Jerusalem under the patronage of the caliph Abd al-Malik in the late seventh century. A powerful symbol of Islam, the shrine is considered the third of the most holy of Islamic sites (after the Ka'ba in Mecca and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina). Although it "is often called the first work of Islamic architecture . . . this building so completely follows the traditions of late antique and Byzantine architecture that some people do not even regard it as Islamic at all. The people who built it, however, undoubtedly meant it to serve an 'Islamic' function."[30] Understanding the function, history, and symbolism of this unique structure in particular is a critical element in any discussion of Islamic religious art.

The city of Jerusalem has played an extremely important, if at times somewhat variable, role in the history of Islam since the foundation of the faith in the early seventh century and to the present day. A holy city for Jews and Christians alike (it is the site of the ancient Jewish Temple and the site of the death and resurrection of Jesus), the city of Jerusalem came under Islamic control in the early seventh century (around 636–38) just a few years after the death of Muhammad. During his lifetime, and up until 622 when he proclaimed



Figure 11.8 The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Israel, begun 691, exterior. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

that the proper direction for prayer was Mecca, early Muslim prayers were originally directed to the city of Jerusalem, reflecting the sanctity of this holy city in Judeo-Christian tradition as well. "Although the Qur'an does not explicitly say so, the original direction for prayer was Jerusalem."[31]

Jerusalem is also intimately connected with Muhammad via the account of his mystical "Night Journey" (or *isra'*), which is briefly mentioned in sura (chapter) 17 of the Qur'an. According to tradition, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad one night and gave him a mystical winged creature called *al-Buraq* (or "Lightning"). This celestial steed had the face of a woman and the tail of a peacock and transported the Prophet through the night skies to the city of Jerusalem. Alighting at the site of the Temple of Solomon and on the sacred rock of the Temple Mount, Muhammad met and prayed with Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets before climbing a ladder of light up through the heavens to meet with Allah. This ascension to and return from heaven is known as the *mi'raj*. This Night Journey and Ascension, Muhammad's "real and physical or spiritual and mystical journey to cosmic boundaries . . . was a major part of the collective memory shared by the faithful."[32] The tangible evidence of this is said to be marked by the footprint of the Prophet visible in the sacred rock in Jerusalem. In the same night, Muhammad returned down the heavenly ladder of light to Jerusalem, and his mystical steed transported him back to Mecca.

In Muslim tradition (mirroring Christian and Jewish traditions), the site is also associated with the last days and the final judgment, at which time "the angel of death, Isra'fil, will stand on the Rock and sound the end of time with

his trumpet."[33] Thus, the building has a multitude of meanings. It "has become a commemorative monument for the Prophet's mystical journey into the heavens, but it was built . . . for the very ideological local purposes of sanctifying the old Jewish Temple according to the new Revelation and of demonstrating to the Christian population of the city that Islam was the victorious faith."[34]

The sacred oblong rock (approximately 56 by 42 feet) that is enshrined in the Dome of the Rock is enclosed within an octagonal structure with four doors facing the cardinal directions. The architectural form with its centralized plan closely resembles slightly earlier Byzantine models of shrines and *martyria* (saintly tombs). The exterior is richly decorated with brilliant tile work of geometric patterns and largely Qur'anic inscriptions, which primarily date from the early to mid-16th century under the patronage of the Ottoman sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1494–1566). Similar tile work appears on the drum that supports the impressive golden dome. The present gold-colored aluminum of the dome dates to the 20th century, but the shape and color of the dome today mirror the original lead-sheathed and gilded original.

The interior space is divided by columns and piers into two ambulatories encircling the Rock itself. This arrangement allows for the ritual circumambulation (*tawaf*) undertaken by pilgrims to the shrine. The interior dome rises 70 feet above the floor and is covered with gilt plaster in intricate patterns and calligraphic verses. Windows of colored glass in the walls and drum bathe the interior and extensive mosaics in a soft light. Pilgrims proceed around the rock and gaze upwards at the glowing dome, as Muhammad himself was transported to and returned from the heavens.

"It is important to recall that, in addition to its continued forceful presence, the Dome of the Rock was the first monument sponsored by a Muslim ruler that was conceived as a work of art, a monument deliberately transcending its function by the quality of its forms and expression."[35] The balance, symmetry, and brilliant decoration of the monument also reflect its religious and political significance. Situated on the Temple Mount (known to Muslims as the *Haram al-Sharif* or Noble Sanctuary), on the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, in a city long sacred to Christians also, the lengthy history of the Dome of the Rock continues, in many ways, to symbolize the relatedness as well as the tensions between the faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and the supreme significance of the city of Jerusalem for all of these faiths.

Two Persian Manuscripts with Narrative Illustrations

Exquisitely illuminated manuscripts—enriched with complex, jewel-like paintings—typify the arts produced for royal patrons of the Timurid and Safavid dynasties in late medieval Persia. Both of these examples are illustrated pages from manuscripts produced for courtly patrons. They may serve as exemplars of the richness, delicacy, and detail associated with one of the most flourishing eras in the history of Islamic book production.

The production of manuscripts has a lengthy history in the Islamic world. Unlike their Western counterparts, which were written on parchment (animal skin), most Islamic manuscripts were—from at least the 10th century onward—written and illustrated on paper (knowledge of which had been earlier introduced from China). The paper (a mixture of rag and shreds of flax) was starched and given a glossy sheen by burnishing. The jewel-like pigments were derived from mineral and vegetable materials. Gold leaf and polished gold and silver flecks can also contribute to the glowing details of these lavish pages.

Although manuscripts of the Qur'an with figural and narrative scenes will not be found, many other works were often enriched with illustration programs from the 11th century onward in various regions of the Islamic world. These include historical chronicles, scientific and medicinal treatises, works of philosophy, moral teachings, literature, and poetry. The styles of painting and script vary widely from region to region and often demonstrate various cross-cultural influences as well as distinct local styles.

Both of the examples shown here also demonstrate the interesting and complex paradox of figural imagery in Islamic art. As mentioned earlier, "traditional Islamic civilization is supposed to have spurned images altogether. Specialists . . . have therefore tended to remain extremely wary of trying to account for the undeniable existence of this civilization's plastic and especially figurative arts."[36] Although it has been argued that figural imagery in Islamic art appears primarily in secular contexts, such as literary and historical works produced for lay patrons, in cases such as the examples shown here, the subject matter of the texts and the illustrations is far from purely secular. "Many of these paintings lie embedded in didactic sacral texts with explicitly moral or mystical themes [or texts which] are themselves deeply devout, laced with Koranic inscriptions, and closely styled upon Koranic verbal imagery."[37]

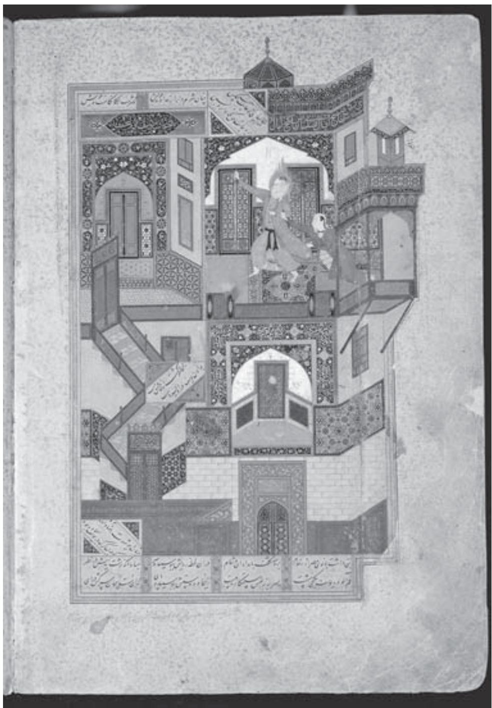


Figure 11.9 Joseph and Zulaykha, manuscript illustration by Bihzad, in a *Bustan* of Sa'di, 1488, Herat. Cairo: National Library Ms Arab Farsi 908, f. 52v. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

The illustrated manuscript depicting the scene of Joseph and Zulaykha, created by the renowned painter Bihzad (Kamal al-Din Bihzad, 1465–1535), in the court sphere of Herat (present-day Afghanistan) in 1488, is an excellent case in point (see Figure 11.9). The manuscript is a copy of a work titled the *Bustan* (The Orchard)—a collection of moral lessons that were originally composed in the 13th century by the Persian poet Sa'di of Shiraz.

> Ever since he composed them in the thirteenth century, Sa'di's *Bustun*, in Persian verse, and its companion volume, the *Gulistan* ("Rose Garden") in mixed Persian verse and prose, were regarded throughout Persianate Eastern Islam as the civilization's twin supreme literary models of the genre known as *andarz*, or 'moral admonishment,' consisting of a collection of pious fables in the first place addressed to princes.[38]

The late 15th-century copy was created for the Timurid ruler of Herat, Sultan Husayn Mirza Bayqara (reigned 1470–1506), under whose patronage Herat became a major center of literature and manuscript production.

Each of the 10 sections of the poem concerns specific moral virtues—as well exemplified by the scene of the attempted seduction of Joseph by Zulaykha. This is one of four full-page illustrations in the manuscript securely attributed to (indeed, signed by) Bihzad, in addition to a frontispiece which, it is generally agreed, includes work by Bihzad and his teacher, Mirak. The story itself ultimately derives from the tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife from the Hebrew scriptures, in which the wife of the Egyptian minister, Potiphar, attempts to entrap the young Joseph during his captivity in Egypt. Featured also in sura 12 of the Qur'an—and embellished and expanded in later commentaries—for the 13th-century poet Sa'di, the tale primarily served as a "warning to distinguish between God and idols,"[39] to remain steadfast and chaste in one's piety and devotion. This religious reading of the poem had also been greatly expanded by another writer just a few years before the illustrated copy was produced in Herat. "The most eminent literary figure and religious authority in contemporary Herat, the mystic writer Jami,"[40] composed, in 1484, a work titled *Yusef* [Joseph] *and Zulaykha*. Verses from this work, as well as Sa'di's, can be found inscribed in the illustration by Bizhad.

Indeed, the elaborate architectural structure found in Bihzad's illustration derives purely from Jami's description of the magnificent and labyrinthine palace that Zulaykha had constructed in order to entrap Joseph. The structural complexity of the palace is brilliantly conveyed in Bihzad's painting with its flat and angular patterns showing doors, windows, gates, and balconies all extending and overlapping in a claustrophobic and complicated fashion. The palace ultimately symbolizes the material world and its temptations, and the seven rooms (through which Zulaykha led Joseph, locking the doors behind them) represent stages of the soul's journey to God. "The doors, which are so prominently displayed and lead the eye through the composition, are tightly shut and can only be opened by God."[41] At the moment of Joseph's epiphany, when he flees from Zulaykha, all the locked doors miraculously open before him. Joseph is also understood to be a symbol for God, and Zulaykha represents the soul's yearning for God. "The woman completely lost in her love of Joseph is a fine symbol for the enrapturing power of love, expressed by the mystic in the contemplation of divine beauty revealed in human form. . . . Zulaykha has become . . . the symbol of the soul, purified by ceaseless longing in the path of poverty and love."[42]

"Religious imagery in medieval Islam raises a theological problem far more complex than usually allowed, perhaps even realized, by most contemporary writers on the arts of this culture."[43] It appears that "a later owner of this manuscript, in an iconophobic fit, scratched away Joseph's face."[44] The issue of facial features in figural narrative imagery is handled differently in the next example.

An illustration of the *Ascent of Muhammad* comes from another Persian manuscript produced for a royal patron, the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp I (1524–76), who established his capital at Tabriz in present-day Iran (see Plate 22). The manuscript dates to ca. 1540 and is a copy of another very popular and often-illustrated literary work: the *Khamsa* (Five Poems or Five Jewels) of Nizami (Nizami Ganjavi, 1141–1209). The *Khamsa* is a lengthy work, composed in the *masnavi* style of rhymed couplets. It contains five major sections, including historical and folk tales, romantic stories, and didactic, philosophical materials dealing with theological matters. The illustrated copy made for Shah Tahmasp in the mid-16th century "is constantly cited . . . as one of the masterpieces of Persian book-painting."[45]

There are 14 paintings in the book that date to the time of Tahmasp. Four additional paintings were added later. The manuscript was not finished during the lifetime of the patron, who appears to have lost interest in the arts of the book around 1545, shortly after this manuscript was started. Among the paintings from the mid-16th century is the illustration of the ascent (or Night Journey) of Muhammad; this painting is attributed to the master artist Sultan-Muhammad. The scene shows the prophet in the center of the composition; he is seated on his mystical steed who transports him through the night sky on his journey between Mecca and Jerusalem. Guided by the archangel Gabriel, attended by a hoard of gift-bearing angels, the prophet is surrounded by golden, radiant flames, indicating the miraculous nature of this event. The brilliant colors, exquisite details, and the energy and animation of the figures are especially remarkable.

One notes that the face of the prophet is hidden behind a veil, so no facial features are shown. But many other *Khamsa* manuscripts (which often include this scene) show the prophet's face.[46] Indeed, the illustration of the Night Journey and Ascension of Muhammad appears frequently in medieval Persian manuscripts, and in fact, there are some manuscripts completely devoted to the details of this miraculous event.[47] Perhaps the emphasis on this subject in Persian art may be "because, from the 11th century, the Ascension played a special role in the mystical imagination of Islam in Iran [or] because the imagination of a quasi-magical vision lends itself more easily to illustration than more common scenes from the Life of Muhammad."[48] Again, it seems clear that at some periods and in some regions, "the proscription against human and animal representation in Qur'ans did not extend to secular manuscripts, and consequently they frequently contain a wealth of figural imagery,"[49] even if the imagery and texts are of a highly religious and clearly non-secular nature. It is also obvious that "attitudes to the use of images clearly differed between periods, between regions and between social classes"[50]—a situation that still exists today.

An Ottoman Prayer Rug, Late 16th Century



Figure 11.10 Prayer rug, 16th century, Ottoman. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The James F. Ballard Collection, Gift of James F. Ballard, 1922 (22.100.51) Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

When Muslims perform their prayers—which involve physical actions of kneeling and prostration—they often make use of mats or rugs, such as this especially fine example from the late 16th century (see Figure 11.10). Prayer rugs (the term "rug" officially applies to works of a smaller size than carpets) are, most often, distinguishable by designs that indicate a directional emphasis rather than an overall or purely symmetrical pattern. In this case, the directional emphasis is shown via the three-arched architectural motifs with single and paired columns indicating niches. These represent the *qiblah* (direction of prayer to Mecca) and the *mihrab* (niche), traditionally found in Islamic mosques. In this example, a lamp is depicted in the mihrab, suspended from the central arch.

The rich colors, as well as the floral, foliate, and decorative designs on this example, are typical of the luxury arts produced for the Ottoman court sphere of the 16th and 17th centuries. This particular example has been attributed to a workshop in Bursa or Istanbul and is a very early example of a triple-arched format as well as a rare early survival of an Ottoman court prayer rug.

Rugs such as these are painstakingly hand-knotted on a matrix of vertical (warp) threads stretched on a loom. Horizontal (weft) threads are inserted between the rows of hand-tied knots. The closely cropped knots create the slightly raised pile surface of the rug. Especially detailed patterns, such as seen here, are created with knots of very fine, thread-like yarn, whereas bolder and less detailed patterns are obtained with thicker and denser yarns. In this example, warp and weft threads are of silk, and the knotted pile is of wool and cotton threads. The colors of the yarns are derived from dyes made of various mineral, vegetable, and animal substances, such as plants, insects, and nutshells.

Examples such as this indicate not only the opulence of Ottoman court style but also the continued importance and ubiquitous presence of textiles in the Islamic arts generally. There is a lengthy tradition of fine textile production across the centuries and regions associated with Islamic cultures. The study of textiles is a vast and complex field. Different styles, motifs, colors, and materials

are associated with many different centers of textile production from Egypt to Persia to India, and specific style variants typify Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal productions, for example. Given the perishable nature of the materials however, few examples survive from much earlier than the 12th century, although literary references and depictions of textiles in other media certainly demonstrate the continued prominence of the textile arts.

It has been noted "that textiles in Islamic society fulfilled far more than the functions normally expected of them in other societies . . . [and that this may] account for some of the major characteristics of Islamic art in general."[51] Knotwork, interlace patterns, surface decoration, and textile-derived motifs are pervasive in Islamic ornamentation, and "the terms which naturally and insistently impose themselves refer back to textiles."[52] Any discussion of Islamic religious art (and Islamic art in general) would be dramatically incomplete without at least a brief mention of the textile arts and the critical role of the prayer rug in Islamic worship.

NOTES

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33. Grabar, *Dome,* 56.

34. Grabar, "Iconography of Islamic Architecture," 52.

35. Grabar, *Shape of the Holy,* 52.

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44. Barry, 197.

45. Blair and Bloom, *Art and Architecture of Islam: 1250–1800,* 324.

46. Richard Ettinghausen and Marilyn Jenkins, *The Arts of Islam: Masterpieces from the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 176.

47. Such manuscripts include the 15th-century *Miraj Nameh* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Supplément Turc 190), which contains over 60 illuminations detailing all the visions and stages in this event. See Marie-Rose Seguy, *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet* (New York: George Braziller, 1977).

48. Oleg Grabar, *Mostly Miniatures: An Introduction to Persian Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 91.

49. Nasser Khalili, *Islamic Art and Culture: A Visual History* (New York: Overlook, 2006), 64.

50. Tim Stanley, *Palace and Mosque: Islamic Art from the Middle East* (London: V & A Publications, 2004), 52.

51. Lisa Golombek, "The Draped Universe of Islam," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World,* ed. Priscilla Soucek (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 25.

52. Dominique Clevenot, *Splendors of Islam: Architecture, Decoration, and Design* (New York: Vendome, 2000), 203.

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—12—

Hinduism

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Hinduism is an ancient, complex, and multifaceted belief system whose early origins can be traced to the end of the prehistoric periods of civilization in the Indus Valley region of India and Pakistan (ca. 2000–1500 BCE). With a long history of vibrant development continuing to the present day, Hinduism might be more correctly termed a "way of life," rather than a "religion" involving a standard creed or consistently shared set of worship practices. Hinduism has no one single founder and has evolved through the centuries to encompass a great variety of beliefs and worship modes, or "traditions which share a family resemblance."[1] Hinduism, in various forms, is the major religion of India today and also has adherents in numerous branches worldwide. Additionally, Hinduism has given rise to two other major belief systems—Buddhism and Jainism—and many variations of Hindu beliefs and practices have evolved in different forms through its long history.

The terms Hindu and Hinduism originally derived from a geographic rather than religious designation. Both words come from *sindhu*, the ancient name for the Indus River. Later usage expanded the term to refer to India generally, but it was not until the 19th century, under British Colonial rule, that the term Hindu was used to refer to the religious practices of Indians who were not Muslims, Christians, or members of any other specifically named religion. However, "even though anachronistic, the term 'Hinduism' remains useful for describing and categorizing the various schools of thought and practice that grew up within a shared Indian society and employed a common religious vocabulary."[2]

The earliest evidences of many foundational Hindu beliefs and practices date to ancient India during the Vedic period—named after the Vedas, the original sacred texts of Hinduism. The term *Vedas* means "knowledge" or "wisdom" in Sanskrit—the language in which these ancient texts were composed and originally orally transmitted. The oldest of the four major Vedic texts (the *Rig Veda*) has been dated to ca. 1500–1200 BCE. The Vedas are collections of hymns and prayers to a variety of gods and goddesses and, along with other early sacred works (such as the *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas*), include descriptions of and directions for rituals and sacrifices. These ceremonies were carried out by carefully trained priests (or brahmins) and were designed to worship and honor various deities associated with specific natural and cosmological forces or events, such as fire, water, wind, and so on. More philosophical texts that contain didactic and allegorical stories, plus mystical meditations, were composed ca. 600 BCE. These significant later texts are known as the Upanishads and are considered the last of the divinely inspired Vedic writings. The term *Upanishad* means "sitting near" or "sitting at the feet" of a teacher. These texts primarily take the form of dialogues or question-and-answer sessions between students seeking spiritual guidance and sages who offer their wisdom. Altogether, the sacred texts of the Vedic period are often categorized as *shruti* (heard or revealed), reflecting the ultimate divine sources of their inspiration and their original oral transmission.

In the post-Vedic period, many other significant sacred texts were created. As a whole, these are often categorized as *smriti* (remembered) literature, reflecting their inspired human authorship, different sources, and formats. Among the massive corpus of these writings are *puranas* (ancient stories about the major deities, especially Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, and the Goddess), *sutras* (commentaries), *shastras* (religious law texts), and the great epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which are still exceedingly popular today. The *Ramayana* (Story of Rama), the *Mahabharata* (Great Epic of India—often described as the longest poem in the world), and the *Bhagavad Gita* (Song of the Blessed One—an especially significant section of the *Mahabharata*) were created, edited, and expanded between the fourth century BCE and the fourth century CE. These lively and complex stories of adventures, battles, and romance contain allegories, critical moral teachings, and spiritual guidance. They provide the foundation for classical Hindu beliefs in multiple manifestations of deities, the importance of devotion to these deities, codes of moral conduct, and the concepts of karma and reincarnation, and they define the traditional social structures in Indian society involving class and status (or caste).

Both Buddhism and Jainism, respectively founded in the sixth century BCE by the historical figures of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha, ca. 566–486 BCE) and Vardhamama (called Mahavira the Jina, the Victorious One, ca. 599–527 BCE), represent evolutions from and reactions to some aspects of the Hinduism of their time period, especially the belief in the divinely inspired status of the Vedas, the monolithic authority of the priestly class, and the caste system of social hierarchy as a whole. Concurrently, the expanding body of post-Vedic

literature, especially in the form of the great epics and the *puranas*, is also reflective of many dynamic transformations in worship practices, new schools of thought, and growing branches (sects, subcommunities, or denominations) of Hinduism well into the first several centuries CE.

The period from ca. 700 to 1200 CE represents an especially flourishing time for Hinduism when a number of regional dynasties in India adopted worship practices focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the gods Vishnu and Shiva. Often known as the period of Temple Hinduism, many of the great architectural and sculptural monuments date from this time.

Buddhism, as a separate religious system, was virtually extinct in India by ca. 1200 CE, having migrated widely elsewhere in Asia and having been, to some extent, reintegrated by Hinduism. Both faiths were also dramatically challenged by the arrival of Islam in India via political/military conquest in the 11th and 12th centuries. From about 1200 to 1700 CE, northern India came under the control of Islamic rulers. There were periods of intense conflict during this time, as well as evidences of mutual toleration and intermingled influences, such as the special growth of mystical Islamic Sufism in India. During this period of Muslim rule, following the centuries of Temple Hinduism, "Hindus responded to the presence and political sway of Islam . . . in complex, diverse, and creative ways. . . . What is most apparent in late medieval Hinduism is the vitality of forms of religion that are devotional, esoteric, or syncretic, and a corresponding de-emphasis on the role of religion in constituting the political and social order."[3]

Of particular importance in the continued evolution and widespread appeal of Hinduism have been the various *bhakti,* or devotional movements, which focus on personal and often intense worship of specific deities in ways accessible to all believers. During this late medieval period also, the religion of Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who disagreed with the religious practices and beliefs of both Hindus and Muslims. The term Sikh derives from the Sanskrit word *sisya* (pupil). Sikhism continues to flourish today among a minority of the population in India and elsewhere.

From the late 18th to the mid-20th century, India was under British Colonial rule. Hindu religious response to this situation was varied and notably took the form of several reform movements that sought to modernize Hindu practices or rephrase the beliefs into terms more appealing to Western audiences.

> Throughout the colonial period, the British viewed India as a society made up of distinct, identifiable religious communities: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, "tribals," and so on . . . the British use of unequivocal categories to classify a religious reality that was complex and mingled promoted a clarification and hardening of religious distinctions. . . . The outcome of this "communalization" was that, when the English finally quit India in 1947, they felt it necessary to divide their colony along religious lines into two nation-states, Islamic Pakistan and Hindu India. This tragic decision led to terrible violence and suffering amongst Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs alike during the Partition, and its consequences are still felt powerfully in the politics of modern South Asia.[4]

The diversity of practices characteristic of Hinduism throughout its lengthy history continue to be evident today. Hinduism continues to evolve and develop, retaining and expanding a vibrant and complex set of traditions, practices, and art forms.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

Because of Hinduism's lengthy history and continued multifaceted evolution to the present day, the diversity of its branches, and its remarkable ability to transform, there is no clear and simple way to succinctly define the principal beliefs and key practices of Hindus. "Hinduism is not a reality that succumbs to this process . . . it is a kind of unity-in-diversity, a continuum forever adapting to new circumstances."[5] It "is a dynamic, living reality (or rather, a macro-reality of organically united micro-realities. . . .) whose strength lies in its ability to adapt to circumstances while it maintains strands of continuity with the past."[6]

Perhaps because Hinduism does not have one single founder, one prophet, or even several divinely inspired seers accepted by all Hindus, and because Hinduism does not have a formal creed or a set of sacred scriptures universally acknowledged as fully authoritative by all Hindus, some fundamental questions arise about the nature of the religion. For example, is Hinduism a polytheistic or a monotheistic religion? It is typical of Hinduism that the answer to this question is both yes and no. It could be said that "philosophically, Hinduism is a monotheistic religion, but in practice it is pluralistic and polytheistic."[7]

In other words, although many gods and goddesses may be and are worshiped by Hindus, the various deities are all understood, by the majority of Hindus, to be manifestations of a single supreme principle: Brahman. This supreme Brahman is infinite and cannot be described or comprehended. It is truth, knowledge, existence, and consciousness, and it encompasses everything known and unknown. This entity is both without attributes (*nirguna*) and with attributes (*saguna*) and in this latter aspect "assumes a form and name to make itself accessible to humankind."[8] Hence, "the statement that 'God is One' does not mean the same thing in India and the West."[9]

The primary deities traditionally recognized by many Hindus as manifestations of the ultimate Brahman are Brahma (the creator of the universe), Vishnu (the preserver of the universe), Shiva (the destroyer of the universe), and Devi (the Goddess/feminine principle). The perpetual creation-maintenance-destruction cycle of regeneration that is overseen and directed by the major deities is enhanced and also complicated by the fact that all three major male deities have various "manifestations" (both male and female) and are paired with female counterparts, and each god or goddess can take many forms. For example, Shiva (the destroyer of the universe) is also considered to be a creative and regenerative force. He is often paired with the goddess Parvati, who represents his female energy. Their son, the elephant-headed god Ganesha, brings good luck and prosperity[10] (see Figure 12.1). Shiva is the Lord



Figure 12.1 Ganesha, stone sculpture, ca. 1141, Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebid, Karnataka (Mysore), India. Art Resource, NY.

of the Dance, setting the universe in motion. He is also a teacher, and he represents the forces of change and destruction as well. The Goddess/feminine principle (Devi) is not only nurturing but also fierce and highly destructive. Additionally, many of the gods and goddesses have various reincarnations, or avatars. For example, the life and deeds of Krishna, the eighth incarnation of the god Vishnu, are featured especially in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Rama (the hero of the *Ramayana*) is also an avatar of Vishnu, and many Hindus consider the Buddha to have been another (and the most recent) avatar of Vishnu.

Other fundamental beliefs characteristic of classical Hinduism include the concepts of *samsara* (rebirth/reincarnation), *karma* (actions and consequences), and *moksha* (liberation from *samsara*). The earliest references to these ideas can be found in the Upanishads (ca. 600 BCE). These three related concepts have provided the foundation for centuries of discussion and interpretation. The belief in reincarnation rests on the concept that the souls of all beings (human and animal) are not confined to purely earthly bodies and that, upon death, souls transmigrate into and animate new beings. Just as the seasons of the year and the hours of the day perpetually cycle from light to dark and from winter to spring, so do souls/life forces undergo a cycle of birth/death/rebirth and continually begin anew. The belief in karma offers an explanation for the

diversity of life forms and the relative positions of these lives in the earthly hierarchy—from the lowest, most downtrodden beings to the creatures with higher positions of relative comfort and greater abilities. Karma can be translated as "actions" or "merit," and although souls perpetually transmigrate and begin anew, these new beginnings are directly influenced by past actions and deeds. Good moral conduct and appropriate actions in one life can influence one's next life and one's next lives. Gaining release or liberation from this endless cycle of birth and rebirth may be achieved by souls who attain the highest state of enlightenment and are thus freed from the karmic cycle. Needless to say, the many diverse schools of Hindu thought approach these topics in different ways.

Similarly, different branches of Hinduism have various worship practices. The principal form of worship involves rituals known as *puja*, which are expressions of devotion and the making of offerings to the deities. *Puja* takes place both in temples and in homes.[11] Generally speaking, *puja* is not a congregational event that involves a fixed day per week (as groups of Christians may attend church every Sunday) but is an ongoing and fundamental aspect of the daily lives of devout Hindus. In large temples especially, *puja* is generally performed two or three times a day or more (morning, noon, evening, nighttime) and takes the form of symbolic actions involving offerings of flowers, food, water, adornments, light (candles or lamps—the waving of lamps is known as *arati*), and prayers directed to an image of a deity or an object that symbolizes the deity (see Figures 12.2 and 12.3). Painted images, three-dimensional sculptures, and symbolic forms such as the *linga* (a pillar, representing divine energy, specifically associated with Shiva) and *yoni* (basin surrounding a linga, often said to represent female creative power), are focal points for Hindu worship.[12] Daily temple *puja*, often assisted by priests, can involve more elaborate rituals and objects than *puja* performed in home shrines.



Figure 12.2 *Women Worshiping a Shiva linga,* ca. 1610, manuscript illumination. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

> Temple *puja* is not truly congregational worship, but devotees do attend the ceremony as an audience. Some are present only for a short time: they reverently present their offerings . . . they behold the image of the god, make their requests to him, say mantras, and then leave. Others, however, will sit or stand throughout the ceremony, praying and singing devotional songs at appropriate times.[13]

There are also a number of special events, rites of passage, and other commemorations that call for special *pujas* to be performed. "Whether as a simple act of private devotion or as a multi-leveled communal performance, *pujas* bring together the human and the divine worlds at specific times and places . . . *Puja* . . . embodies the very reality that it seeks to adore."[14]



Figure 12.3 *Woman Worshiping the Goddess* (Devi), ca. 1750, painting. New Delhi: National Museum. Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.

There are also an enormous number of religious holidays in the Hindu calendar for which larger communal festivals are held in honor of specific deities. In a sense, every day is an opportunity for worship, and the complexity and diversity of Hindu practices means that nearly all days are set aside for special festivals by various groups. Some of the largest festivals are those held at the fall equinox (the *Durga Puja* or *Navaratri*—nine nights—celebrations in honor of the goddesses Durga, Sarasvati, and Lakshmi), the late winter/spring *Holi* celebrations (commemorating the downfall of the evil female demon Holika, a joyous occasion reveling in the colors of spring when people throw brightly colored powders at each other), and the mid-fall *Dipavali* or *Diwali* festival (Necklace of Lights) marking the triumph of good and light over evil and darkness. *Diwali* is probably the most widely celebrated of Hindu festivals. During this period, homes and temples are decorated with lights, fireworks displays are held, new clothes are worn, presents are exchanged, and special meals are enjoyed. Processions of sacred images, dance, music, and chanting are essential aspects of Hindu worship practices.

Pilgrimage also plays an extremely important role in Hinduism.[15] There are thousands of sacred sites and cities associated with specific deities or divine events. Indeed, it can be said that "the entire land of India is, to the eyes of Hindu pilgrims, a sacred geography."[16] All sacred sites are known as *tirthas* (crossing places or fords) where pilgrims may receive blessings and spiritual assistance in crossing through the realms of *samsara* and *karma,* the oceans of life and death, to achieve ultimate liberation.

Many of the preeminent pilgrimage places in India are located on rivers or near water. The Ganges river is especially venerated, and the ancient city of Varanasi (also known as Benares or Kashi—the City of Light—the abode of the god Shiva), located on the Ganges, is generally regarded as Hinduism's most sacred city (see Figure 12.4). "Bathing in the Ganges, a river said to have fallen from heaven to earth, is the first act of Banaras pilgrims and a daily rite for Banaras residents."[17] Many Hindus believe that bathing in the Ganges provides

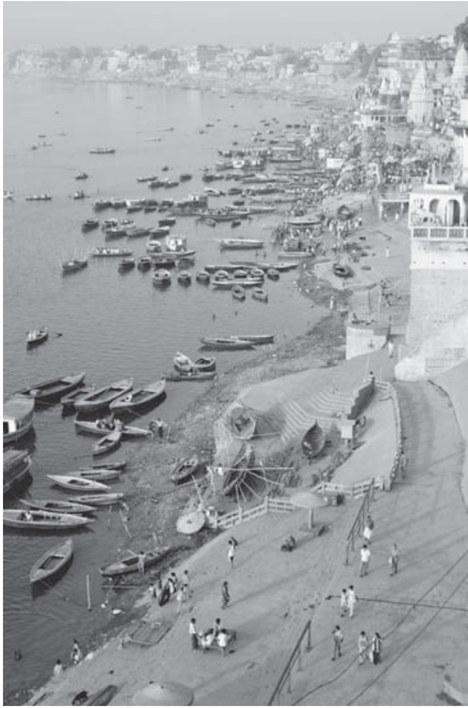


Figure 12.4 View of the ghats in Varanasi, India. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

release from the karmic cycle; many come to Benares to die and have their cremated remains placed into the holy river in order to achieve liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Hinduism, with its complex panoply of deities and extensive sacred literature, is no doubt among the most actively "art-friendly" of the major world religions. Although formal congregational worship is, or may be, of relatively minor importance for many devotees, Hinduism is characterized by extremely vibrant art forms: images of gods and goddesses, impressive temple architecture, and home shrines with a high degree of color and decoration.

The richness and complexity of Hindu art may indeed seem quite overwhelming, as is especially well demonstrated in the history of western European writings about and responses to India and Indian art.[18] To eyes unfamiliar with the forms and symbols, the depictions of Hindu deities (with multiple arms and heads, often in half-human, half-animal form) may seem quite bizarre and outlandish. Hindu temples do not really function like Christian churches or Islamic mosques but rather serve as dwelling places for deities who are embodied in the cult images or symbols contained therein. The worship of the Shiva *linga* (a highly phallic form) and the presence of apparently erotic sculptures on the exteriors of numerous Hindu temples have all contributed to a history of Western fascination with, as well as—at times—bafflement about, Hindu art. Much early Western scholarship on "Hindu art tells us a great deal about the dominant values of the West—when other exotic and distant arts [appear to have been] assimilated more easily in Western culture."[19] Another great challenge in studies of Hindu art (and indeed with all religious art in general) is that oftentimes objects designed to be placed and used within specific ritual contexts are now likely to be seen as "art objects" in museums. It is critical to maintain, as far as possible, an awareness of the original context and function of works of religious art.[20]

The Hindu Image

To begin to approach and preliminarily understand the arts of Hinduism, one needs to be aware of several concepts, among the most significant of which

is *darsan* (or *darshan*). *Darsan* has been translated in a variety of ways, such as "sacred seeing," seeing and being seen by God, the benefits and blessings pursuant to viewing sacred images, and the power and efficacy involved with and inherent in sacred images. Many world religions rely on sacred images as teaching tools and as focal points for devotional practices. The Hindu concept of *darsan* transcends and expands these meanings of sacred images in significant ways. *Darsan* "is the single most common and significant element of Hindu worship" and bespeaks "the power and importance of 'seeing' in the Hindu religious tradition."[21]

Understanding the concept of *darsan* requires recalling that, in the Hindu worldview, the universe and everything in it are related manifestations of the unbounded energy of the unknowable and supreme Brahman. This force exists *with* and *without* attributes. The energies of nature, the deities, humans, all forms of life, and all earthly and heavenly surroundings are aspects of the divine. "According to traditional Indian belief every creature has its own purpose which it fulfills on earth. The purpose of the artist was to reproduce those Divine forms which in turn lead the spectator to union with the Divine."[22]

Images of the divine thus play a fundamental role in Hindu religious practices. Seeing these images, and in turn *being seen by* the images, is the primary goal. "When Hindus go to a temple, they do not customarily say, 'I am going to worship,' but rather, 'I am going for *darsan*.'"[23] *Darsan* can be achieved in several ways. In general, it implies a worshiper's receptivity to the sacred experience, an opening of oneself to the presence of the divine.

> Most individuals . . . need to approach God through images and with rituals specific to that deity, not so much because the deity requires it but because of the limitations of the devotee . . . humans need something concrete on which to focus in prayer. . . . Images are created as receptacles for spiritual energy; each is an essential link that allows the devotee to experience direct communion with the Gods.[24]

The painted images, sculptures, and symbols of the deities that are found in Hindu temples and home shrines are created, consecrated, and treated with the utmost care and respect because they are believed to be inhabited with divine energy. The processes involved with image creation and consecration are governed by specific rules and procedures and must be carried out with appropriate attitudes. The images themselves are believed to be enlivened with the divine, and if damaged or treated with disrespect, they will lose their divine presence. "The divine image is both means (*upaya*) and end (*upeya*.) It leads the devotee toward God, and it also *is* God, the devotee's object of enjoyment. . . . As an instantiation of the god-head, the image is ultimately the message."[25]

The power of the divinity resident in images, and the possibility of divine reanimation of images that have been removed from their original liturgical settings, was well demonstrated quite recently in a 1988 court case in London involving a 12th-century bronze sculpture of Shiva. Discovered (carefully

buried) in the ruins of an Indian temple, the object eventually appeared on the black market, was identified, and was ultimately returned to India after a trial in the British court during which "the god Shiva himself appeared as a plaintiff . . . acting as a 'juristic person' to sue for the recovery of his image."[26]

The Hindu Temple

Hindu temples have been constructed in India and elsewhere for many centuries, and they appear in a great variety of forms and styles. Scholarly writing about Hindu temples has also taken on many different forms and styles through the ages.[27] The long history, diversity, and widespread nature of Hinduism have created challenges for writers wishing to describe and catalogue the myriad architectural examples. Some scholars have focused on chronology, dividing the study of Hindu temples into distinct period units with the goal of seeing an overall stylistic progression. Other writers have focused on matters such as the patronage of specific regional rulers in India, attributing certain styles of architecture to the aims and tastes of these dynasties. Still other writers have concentrated on the symbolism of the Hindu temple, focusing on meanings and messages. Some writers have concentrated on the ritual use of temples. Others have described temple architecture while barely mentioning the sculptural programs; others have focused on temple sculpture while barely mentioning the architectural context. The material, in other words, is vast. All architecture can convey many meanings: the prestige and ambitions of the patrons, the skill and creativity of the artists involved, the original purposes, alterations over time, and present status or usage.

Archaeological and literary evidence suggests that in the ancient Vedic period in India, ritual attention was focused on practices of making offerings and sacrifices to the major Vedic deities. Open-air altars as well as roofed enclosures were constructed for these rituals. As Vedic sacrificial practices gradually declined, the housing and worship of images of deities in shrine structures became more common. The creation of image-shrines for Hindu deities may have begun during the fourth century BCE, a period when Buddhist and Jain art forms were simultaneously developing too, often in close association with each other. The histories of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religious art are closely intertwined.

Ultimately, the primary function of the Hindu temple is to serve as an image-shrine, to serve as a sanctuary and shelter for the deity, and to provide a setting where devotees may offer their prayers. The impressive rock-cut cave-temples on the island of Elephanta, off the coast near Mumbai, demonstrate this well. Dating from the sixth century CE, the large cave-temple dedicated to Shiva contains several sculptured panels depicting different aspects of the deity. Deep within the main cave chamber is a triple-headed bust of Eternal Shiva (*Sadashiva*) in multiple guises (see Figure 12.5). The central head is calm and meditative, the head on the left represents a fierce masculine aspect, and the head on the right depicts a peaceful feminine aspect.

As a free-standing architectural structure, the Hindu temple can be recognized by several characteristic elements all related to its primary function as an enclosure for a deity or deities. The heart of the temple is the sanctuary where the image or symbol of the deity is located. This inner sanctum is known as the *garbhagriha* (womb chamber). Temples are often raised on high bases or plinths and are topped with towers, known in the north as *shikharas* and in the south as *vimanas*. The rock-cut "Shore Temple" at Mamallapuram (or Mahabalipuram), from ca. 700 CE, shows these forms (see Figure 12.6). Two major shrines are topped by impressive pyramidal towers with elaborate details, resembling a series of balconies and parapets. In general, Hindu temples in the south tend to show this pyramidal form of tower (see Figure 12.7), whereas northern-style temples show towers with more rounded profiles (see Figure 12.8).

The exterior sculptured decoration of Hindu temples tends to become even more complex through time. The narratives and symbols depicted in the sculptures are absolutely integral to the meaning of the architecture; they are placed in specific arrangements on the corners, buttresses, towers, and niches, and all relate to the purpose of the temple in serving as an appropriate residence or palace for the deity enshrined therein. "Axiality in relation to the sanctum and



Figure 12.5 Shiva with three aspects, stone sculpture, ca. 550 CE, Elephanta, India. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.



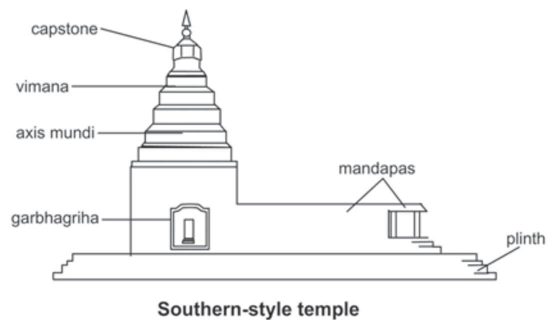
Figure 12.6 Shore Temple, ca. 700, Mamallapurum, India. Courtesy of Shutterstock.



Figure 12.7 Brihadeshvara Temple, early 11th century, Tanjavur, India. The Art Archive / Gianni Dagli Orti.



Figure 12.8 Brahmeswara Temple, mid 11th century, Bhubanesvar, India. Courtesy of Shutterstock.



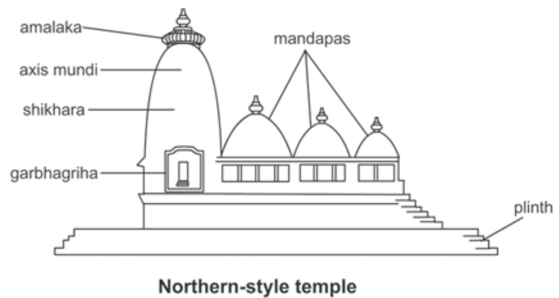


Figure 12.9 Diagram of the Hindu temple. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.

door, compass direction, sequential arrangement, circumabulatory order, hierarchy within the wall, and visual coherence are all at play on the . . . temple exterior."[28]

EXAMPLES

The Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Khajuraho, ca. 1025–50

The Kandariya Mahadeva Temple is an excellent example of the elements most characteristic of Hindu temple architecture during the flourishing medieval period (see Figure 12.10). Constructed under the patronage of the Chandella dynasty, the Kandariya is only one of many temples at the sacred site of Khajuraho. It is estimated that originally about 85 temples were located at the site; about 25 temples still exist there today in some form. These range in date from the 9th through the 12th century and are dedicated to a variety of Hindu deities. The Kandariya temple is dedicated to Shiva. The term Kandariya means "of the cave," and Mahadeva means "the Great God" (that is, Shiva).

The temple is raised on a high base or platform and is entered via a steep staircase on the front. The visitor then passes through a series of several small connected chambers (halls, or *mandapas*) before reaching the heart of the



Figure 12.10 Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, ca. 1025–1050, Khajuraho, India. Borromeo / Art Resource, NY.

temple: the *garbhagriha* (womb chamber) designed to enshrine the image of the deity. A narrow passageway with projecting porches and an open-air zone allows visitors to circumambulate the inner sanctum, which is signaled on the exterior also by the very tall tower (or *shikhara*). This shows the slightly rounded form typical of northern-style temple towers, and it is capped with an *amalaka* or ring-like form.

Altogether, this temple has a highly complex profile. In addition to the main tower, the *mandapas* (halls) are topped with roofs in semi-rounded, stepped, pyramidal form of progressively greater height that lead up to the main tower, which is itself surrounded by a cascade of connected smaller towers and spires. The tower symbolizes the center of the universe (the *axis mundi*) rising upwards with the divine energy radiating from the deity deep within the structure. Additional lines of divine energy are signaled by sculptures on the exterior walls and corners. The sculpture and architecture work together to create a structure that not only serves as a symbol of the divine but also offers a vehicle for seeing and experiencing the divine.

The elaborate exterior sculptures on the Kandariya temple cover virtually every surface. There are horizontal friezes with narrative reliefs and niches filled with images of deities. There are guardian figures (*karnas*), attendant figures (notably celestial females known as *apsaras*), mythical beasts (*vyalas*), and amorous couples (*maithunas*) in an enormous variety of poses. The temple as a whole represents the "universe in microcosm,"[29] and the images serve as "visual 'theologies' . . . and visual scriptures."[30] The densely packed sculptures covering the temple surface "need to be looked at from the perspective of architectural logic rather than as individual units,"[31] all working together to create a grand, cosmic display of divine energy. On the Kandariya temple, "curving lines and sinuous solids [are] paramount and the whole temple [pulsates] to a stupendous linear crescendo."[32] Although but one example among thousands, the Kandariya Mahadeva at Khajuraho is an especially famous and well-studied example of a grand and complex Hindu temple.

Images of Hindu Deities

These bronze sculptures (see Figure 12.11 and Plate 23), both from southern India, represent two of the most important and widely venerated Hindu gods: Vishnu and Shiva. Although many centuries separate these examples in terms of their dates, they both typify many shared and traditional characteristics of Hindu religious images.

These types of sculptures were created for important ritual purposes. Housed in temples, they would have played particularly important roles during festivals and processions. Sculptures of this type are known as *utsava murtis* (the bodies of the gods); they served as mobile and secondary images of the deities otherwise enshrined in non-moveable images or symbols in the inner sanctum of the temple. These processional images "are awakened during the festival

time to provide the gods with the mobile bodies they need to move out into the daily world."[33] "During the rest of the year, when they are not in use, these bronze sculptures are stored away from the center of the temple, although in some temples they are enshrined within the sanctum."[34]



Figure 12.11 Vishnu, bronze sculpture, 17th century, southern India. The Art Archive / Musée Guimet Paris / Gianni Dagli Orti.

Although both examples illustrated are iconic images, depicting the deities in fundamentally human form, they also show symbols, gestures, and actions that present specific aspects of the divine forces. The forms that these images take assist viewers in grasping the nature of the essentially limitless and formless divine. "The things of the world we can see well enough all about us, but for the Indian religious artist the task of image-making was giving shape to those things we cannot readily see."[35]

Vishnu (the Preserver) is "consistently seen as the preserver of harmony and the maintainer of order and tradition."[36] As such, he plays a critical role as a member of the triad of major male Hindu gods, between Brahma (the Creator) and Shiva (the Destroyer). Vishnu's role is to maintain and sustain the universe. Perhaps ultimately derived from the ancient Vedic sun god, Varuna (the keeper of cosmic order), the name Vishnu comes from the Sanskrit term meaning "to work." "He is indeed regarded as the all-doing presence"[37] and embodies goodness, mercy, and sustenance.

This 17th-century example shows many characteristics of his traditional iconography. He is depicted as a tall, stately figure with his feet planted firmly on the ground (base); he is wearing a high crown (or *kiritamukuta*—the highest crown), a richly decorated belt or hip-band (*katibandha*), a symbolic sacrificial cord, and elaborate jewelry (necklaces, earrings, armlets) symbolic of his power, prestige, and importance. In this typically four-armed form he holds two of his chief attributes: the conch shell (the sound of which wards off demons and the spiral form of which represents constantly expanding infinity) and the solar disk or wheel (the symbol of infinity—life and death). His remaining two hands show symbolic gestures (or *mudras*) of blessing, protection, reassurance, and mercy. His four arms and hands may also be seen as symbolic of the stages of human life and his control over all spatial directions. "The interpretation of Vishnu's attributes cannot be precise. Understanding has to be associated with vision or enlightenment, which comes as much from unconscious perception as from a conscious reading of symbols."[38]

In addition to this form, Vishnu is also widely depicted in other ways, specifically in his 10 chief avatars, or manifestations on earth. According to tradition, Vishnu has come to earth at various moments of political and spiritual need, to protect and guide humans. Several of his avatars were animal forms (fish, turtle, boar, half-man/half-lion); in other forms he appeared as a powerful dwarf, as Rama with an axe, as the King Rama (the hero of the epic *Ramayana*), as Balarama (the brother of Krishna), as Krishna (the most popular and widely venerated of all his avatars), and as the Buddha. The tenth and final avatar of Vishnu is yet to come. Known as Kalki, this figure will signal the end of the world, or the conclusion of the present time cycle.

The god Shiva (the Destroyer) also has a highly complex and multifaceted iconography bespeaking his various aspects. "Like a complex personality [he] has multiple forms and a paradoxical character. He is a deity who often inhabits the extremes of human behavior."[39] Shiva represents creation as well as destruction; he symbolizes the forces of regeneration as well as removal; he has an ascetic as well as a highly sexual nature. Frequently worshiped in the aniconic and phallic *linga* form, in iconic guise Shiva may appear as an ascetic, as a teacher, as a fierce and wild demonic type, and most popularly, as *Nataraja,* the Lord of the Dance, as shown in the 11th to 12th century bronze sculpture illustrated in Plate 23.

Shiva Nataraja dances in a ring of flames, symbolizing the fiery forces of destruction and transformation. He stands atop and crushes a demonic dwarf named Apasmara, who represents ignorance and forgetfulness. Shiva's long, matted hair streams out energetically on both sides of his head. Caught within the strands of his hair is a small figure of the goddess Ganga, the personification of the sacred river Ganges, whose descent from heaven Shiva assisted. His four arms represent his power over the four directions. His *mudras* include gestures of protection (raised hand) and salvation (downward pointing hand).

> Nataraja, the lord of dancers, dancing, shows his fivefold activity, the expression of his divine totality. His dancing limbs convey by their movements and symbols the fivefold action of creation, maintenance, dissolution, veiling-unveiling, and liberation. Nataraya dances the cosmos into existence, upholds its existence, and dances it out of existence. . . . The raised leg of the dancer shows the liberating freedom of his dance, the drum raised by the right hand sounds the note of creation, the flame in the left hand flickers in the change brought about by destruction. . . . The movement of the dancer . . . self-enclosed in balanced gyration, is encircled by flames.[40]

The image of the dancing Shiva Nataraja is one of the most popular representations of this deity, and great numbers of bronzes of this type, with minor variations, survive. In the 1988 court case in London mentioned earlier, it was a Shiva Nataraya bronze sculpture that was at the heart of the dispute. Indeed, "most of the large bronze images of Hindu deities displayed in museum collections were originally *utsava murtis*"[41] (processional images) that have lost their power and sacredness as a result of damage, theft, deterioration, or mistreatment.

Krishna and Radha, Miniature Painting, ca. 1760

Krishna is one of the most popular Hindu deities. An avatar of Vishnu, his deeds and adventures are frequently illustrated in art (see Plate 24). These scenes derive from literary sources, such as the *Mahabharata* (including the *Bhagavad Gita*—primarily a conversation between Krishna and the warrior Arjuna) and many other *puranas* or tales concerning this widely venerated deity.

Among the many episodes in Krishna's biography, one that is most celebrated involves his early relationship with his beloved Radha and her companions among the *gopis* (cowgirls or milkmaids). The romantic exploits of Krishna and the *gopis* were especially popular in later Indian miniature painting, such as seen in this example from the middle of the 18th century. Small paintings such as these were created in great numbers, especially at the various royal courts (both Muslim and Hindu) between the 16th and 19th centuries. Created with gouache (vegetable and mineral colors mixed with gum arabic) on specially prepared paper, these miniature paintings were designed to be kept in albums (either bound or loose) for the enjoyment of the courtly patrons. "They were made above all to delight the eye by their rich color harmonies and fluent clarity of line . . . to impart mainly auspicious or pleasurable sentiments, whether of royal grandeur, devotional wonder, or a refined eroticism."[42]

There are a number of distinctive styles of Indian miniature painting associated with various regions, time periods, and patronage. This particular example was produced at the Rajput court in Kishengarh, Rajasthan, during the time of the refined and accomplished ruler and art patron Savant Singh (1699–1764; reigned 1748–57). The delicate and detailed rendering of the figures, drapery, and landscape reflect the elegance and sophistication of the courtly context. They mirror the type of clothing and jewelry favored at the court, as well as the garden settings. In this illustration, Krishna, typically blue-skinned (his name means "dark blue or black"), is in a dancing pose and is being offered a betel leaf by the elegantly dressed Radha. To either side of these famous lovers are groups of Radha's companions, the *gopis*, who are also elegantly dressed and bearing various gifts, jewelry, flowers, vases, and fans made of peacock feathers. According to some of the tales, the *gopis* left their husbands and children in order to follow Krishna, who multiplied himself so as to achieve a personal relationship with each one of them. This symbolizes the intense connection between devotees and deities, especially reflective of *bhakti* (devotional) practices. "Krishna and Radha in the grove are models, as divine lovers, of human love but especially of the soul's devotion to God."[43]

NOTES

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3. Davis, 37.
4. Davis, 46–47.
5. Lipner, 6.
6. Lipner, 12–13.
7. Pratapaditya Pal, *Art of the Himalayas: Treasures from Nepal and Tibet* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1991), 15.
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9. Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 24.
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13. Joseph Dye, *Ways to Shiva: Life and Ritual in Hindu India* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1980), 73.
14. Paul Courtright, "On This Holy Day in My Humble Way: Aspects of Puja," in *Gods of Flesh/Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India,* ed. Joanne Waghorne and Norman Cutler (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 33.
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17. Diana Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3.
18. Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Robert Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986): 401–46.
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20. Vishakha Desai, "Beyond the Temple Walls: The Scholarly Fate of North Indian Sculpture, AD 700–1200," in *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India A.D. 700–1200,* ed. Vishakha Desai and Darielle Mason (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1993), 19–31.
21. Eck, *Darsan,* 1.
22. Alistair Shearer, *Forms of the Formless: The Hindu Vision* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 15.
23. Eck, *Darsan,* 3.
24. Stephen Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 36.
25. Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 33.
26. Richard Davis, "Loss and Recovery of Ritual Self among Hindu Images," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6, no. 1 (1992), 44; and Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 248–52.

27. Michael Meister, "De- and Re-Constructing the Indian Temple," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (1990): 395–400.

28. Darielle Mason, "A Sense of Time and Place: Style and Architectural Disposition of Images on the North Indian Temple," in *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India A.D. 700–1200*, ed. Vishakha Desai and Darielle Mason (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1993), 135.

29. Eck, *Darsan*, 59.

30. Eck, *Darsan*, 41.

31. Desai, "Beyond the Temple Walls," 25.

32. Mason, "A Sense of Time and Place," 217.

33. Joanne Waghorne, "Dressing the Body of God: South Indian Bronze Sculpture in Its Temple Setting," *Asian Art* 5, no. 3 (1992): 17.

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38. Elgood, 64.

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—13—

Buddhism

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Buddhism, one of the world's major religions today, has a lengthy history and exists in many different variations. The origins of Buddhism can be attributed to a historical figure, Siddhartha Gautama, who was born in what is now southern Nepal ca. 566 BCE and who, after a long life of teaching and travels, died at age 80 in 486 BCE.[1] The details of his life have long formed the subject matter for many Buddhist tales and elaborations, notably the *jataka* or "birth" narratives, frequently featured in art, which tell of the Buddha's previous lives before his incarnation as Siddhartha Gautama. He was a royal prince of the Shakya family, who were Indian rulers over a territory at the base of the Himalayan foothills spanning part of present-day northern India and Nepal. He is thus sometimes also known as Shakyamuni—the Sage of the Shakya clan.

The fundamental narrative of his life might be summarized as a journey from worldly wealth to spiritual richness. Traditions recount that, as a young man, Siddhartha enjoyed a very privileged and opulent lifestyle. He was deliberately sheltered from the world outside the royal household by his father, who wished to protect him and prepare him for life as a royal leader. Siddhartha followed these familial expectations; he married a beautiful wife who bore him a son. But he became increasingly curious about the world outside the palace, and in his late twenties (shortly after the birth of his son), he took a series of trips to the local village and there encountered a number of sights that influenced him profoundly. For the first time in his previously sheltered existence, Siddhartha witnessed aspects of human suffering in the form of disease, old age,

and death. He also encountered a wandering ascetic (a Hindu *sadhu* or holy man) and was inspired by this example to renounce his previously opulent lifestyle and search for answers about the meaning and purpose of human life and suffering.

Ultimately, and after many subsequent years of extreme self-denial, discipline, travels, and encounters with others who offered him various forms of guidance and inspiration, Siddhartha sat down to make a final effort in his quest by meditating beneath a tree (later known as the Bodhi Tree, or Tree of Awakening) at Bodh Gaya in northern India. After prolonged meditation, he received profound insights about the nature of human life and existence, and he became the Buddha—a Sanskrit term that means the "Awakened One."

It is very important to realize that the cultural and religious milieu in India that ultimately gave birth to Buddhism represents a period of time when aspects of Hinduism were continuing to develop as well. Hinduism had long been dominated by the Brahmin priestly class and focused especially on rituals performed by these priests. But Buddha's lifetime, the sixth century BCE, was a period "of great intellectual speculation, when many religious leaders questioned and even rejected the authoritarian structures of traditional Indian religion."[2] Both Buddhism and Jainism (also founded in India in the sixth century BCE by Mahavira the Jina—or "Victorious One") represented significant critical challenges to traditional Hinduism while retaining and reinterpreting many of the concepts and vocabulary of Hindu beliefs.

After Buddha's enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, he ultimately determined to share the fruits of his awakening to the "truth" or "law" of human existence (the *dharma*) with others. He first offered his teachings to a small group of his previous companions of ascetics who gathered at a deer park in Sarnath. These followers became the first members of the Buddhist community (the *sangha*), which expanded greatly through the next several decades of the Buddha's travels and teaching in northern India.

After the Buddha's peaceful death, his teachings continued to be orally disseminated as well as interpreted by a growing number of schools and increasingly settled monastic communities. However, doctrinal controversies arose about the specifics and nature of his teachings and about the nature of the Buddha himself. Traditions tell of several early Buddhist meetings or councils that were held to resolve these differences in interpretation; nevertheless, regional sects and schools continued to develop as Buddhism spread widely through India and beyond. Within these early centuries, 18 different schools of Buddhism eventually emerged, including the Theravadan ("Wisdom of the Elders") branch that today continues to be followed in southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. A critical stage in the historical development of Buddhism took place around the first century CE with the reform movement known as Mahayana (or "Great Vehicle"). The term "Great Vehicle" contrasts Mahayana Buddhism with the several Hinayana ("Lesser Vehicle") schools. Theravada and Mahayana are considered to be the two major branches of Buddhism, although many widely

different variations of Mahayana Buddhism, in particular, also developed in subsequent centuries.

Both Theravada and Mahayana schools trace their history back to the teachings of the Buddha himself, although it should be noted that no Buddhist texts were written down, in any language, during the lifetime of the Buddha or even shortly thereafter. The Buddha's teachings were memorized and transmitted orally and translated into a variety of languages and dialects through many centuries before the earliest scriptures were committed to writing. This took place in the first century BCE and first century CE in the Theravadan context of Sri Lanka. This vast body of writings is known as the Pali Canon, after the ancient language (Pali) in which it is written. It is divided into three major sections (or "baskets") of teachings concerning monastic life, discourses of the Buddha, and commentary. The Pali Canon (also known as the *Tripitaka*—or Three Baskets) is the oldest and most conservative collection of Buddhist scriptures.

With the development of Mahayana Buddhism in the first and second centuries CE, many additional texts (*sutras*) were created that also traced their origins to the foundational teachings of the Buddha—teachings that had been hidden but later mystically revealed to enlightened beings, or *bodhisattvas*. Major authors such as Nagarjuna (ca. 150–250 CE) were instrumental in promoting the authority of these later texts, which were seen as adding to, if not fulfilling and superseding, the previous teachings, which were regarded as foundational, but preparatory. "The enormous range and variety of Buddhist scripture has led to many controversies about scriptural authority and interpretation,"[3] as different schools understand a variety of texts to be authoritative. Nevertheless, these all indicate ways of understanding the Buddha's message and represent the flourishing growth, spread, and remarkable ability of Buddhism to adapt to different cultures and settings.

The Mahayana branch of Buddhism is, in itself, extremely diverse and represents a wide range of practices. Buddhism spread to China in the first and second centuries CE and thence to Korea in the fourth century and to Japan in the sixth century. Two waves of Buddhism entered Tibet in the 7th and in the 10th centuries. All of these different styles or branches of Buddhism were also transformed by the already-existing and continuously developing religious systems in these world regions. In China, Buddhism encountered, influenced, and was transformed by preexistent Chinese popular religious traditions, plus Taoism and Confucianism. In Japan, Buddhism merged, to a large extent, with Japanese Shinto practices and resulted in a uniquely Japanese Shinto-Buddhist synthesis. In Tibet, Buddhist practices developed differently as well, assimilating some of the indigenous traditions of Bon shamanistic practices and influencing the continued development of the Bon religion itself.[4] New branches of Buddhism continued to develop in India and in Asia through the medieval period and were transmitted across cultures.

Among the most influential of these later Mahayana developments are Pure Land, Zen, and Tantric Buddhism. The former two are associated particularly

with China and Japan, respectively, and the latter primarily with Tibet. The specifics of these (also multivaried) systems are especially well demonstrated in the diversity of texts and art works that enliven and characterize these movements.

Although Buddhism began in India, and during several periods of history was supported and encouraged by major political leaders (notably the early Emperor Asoka in the third century BCE and the Pala dynasty in southern India in the 8th through 12th centuries CE), by the 13th century Buddhism had significantly declined in India. Several cultural and political factors were doubtless influential in this process of decline, such as the growth and popularity of devotional and revival movements within Hinduism, the reabsorption of many Buddhist concepts and deities into the ever-expanding Hindu pantheon, and the Islamic invasions of India that began in the 12th century. Buddhist monasteries were attacked and looted in the Islamic conquests, and by the 13th century, Buddhism was virtually extinct in its Indian birthplace. Islam and Hinduism are today the dominant religions in India, and Buddhism is widely practiced in world regions outside the Indian subcontinent.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

The lengthy history of Buddhism—combined with the complexities of its historical development and transformations in different world regions—may, at first, seem to make a discussion of principal beliefs and key practices a very daunting task. Although Buddhism has taken on many diverse guises, there are certainly some core concepts that all facets of Buddhism share. The historical Buddha (in whatever ways he is variously perceived, honored, or worshiped by various Buddhist sects) is understood to have been a person of remarkable abilities who transmitted highly important knowledge about the ultimate meaning of life.

These teachings can be, and often are, summarized as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. In the Buddha's personal encounters with and sorrowful concern for human suffering on earth, his enlightenment resulted not only in awareness of human suffering but also in ways in which to alleviate this suffering. This wisdom is contained in the Four Noble Truths.

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering. The Buddha saw and understood that human life will inevitably involve some degree of hardship and suffering (*duhkha*)—whether emotional or physical. His own experience with life, and his witnessing of disease, old age, and death, led him to the painful realization that human life, although often pleasant and happy, is also filled with challenges, difficulties, and disappointments. The second noble truth that he conveyed to his followers regards the origins and causes of suffering. Sufferings and difficulties in life are caused by qualities often seen as simply characteristic of human nature, such as desire, greed, selfishness, ignorance, and attachment to and grasping for material goods, status, power, and relationships. This is all

reflective of human misperceptions of the inherent nature of reality. Humans delude themselves by their ego-based thinking in which they set themselves—as individual beings—apart from the dynamic unity of the universe, which they mistakenly feel they can control and manipulate to some extent by their own positions, actions, and achievements. According to the third noble truth, suffering can be avoided if one frees oneself from inappropriate cravings and attachments that reflect an ego-driven perception of the self. Avoiding attachment can be achieved, according to the fourth noble truth, by following the Eightfold Path of right understanding, right purpose, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right alertness, and right concentration.[5]

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path represent the core of Buddhist teaching, regardless of sectarian divisions. In his lengthy career as a teacher, the Buddha offered many additional insights about the nature of reality and the universe. He established and provided guidance for numerous monastic communities of both men and women, and he promoted a balanced, disciplined, and measured lifestyle to achieve liberation from suffering. This state of liberation is known as *nirvana*. Indeed, many Buddhist concepts (such as *nirvana*) derive from and significantly reinterpret Hindu beliefs in reincarnation (*samsara*), actions and their consequences (*karma*), and liberation (*moksha*) from *samsara,* to achieve a cessation of all ego-based cravings and attachments.

As Buddhism continued to develop in the centuries following the Buddha's death, differing interpretations arose about these teachings and how to follow the ideals in actual practice. Especially after the advent of Mahayana Buddhism in the first and second centuries CE, many new teachers—through the subsequent centuries to the present day—have promoted and emphasized different manners in which to achieve true awareness of the Four Noble Truths and how to correctly enact the guidance offered by the Eightfold Path. The great diversity of schools and branches of Buddhism is actually rather akin to the situation of Protestant Christianity, where vast numbers of adherents consider themselves to be Christians first and foremost, while also maintaining firm allegiances to specific denominations that are themselves characterized by significantly different interpretations of the core Christian teachings and that enact their beliefs through vastly different liturgical practices.

For example, Theravadan Buddhists (often considered to be the most strictly conservative of Buddhist sects) believe that the historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) was the final incarnation of an enlightened being, who appeared on earth, lived, and died and transmitted great wisdom. Mahayana Buddhists, in contrast, regard the historical Buddha as only one manifestation among many related exemplars or incarnations of enlightenment. *Arhats* (saints, ascetics, or worthy ones) feature prominently in Theravada Buddhism because of their achievement of great spiritual discipline, awareness, and ability to provide inspiring examples to others. In Mahayana Buddhism, focus is directed instead on the many manifestations of the Buddha and on the numerous *bodhisattvas* (*buddhas*-to-be) who compassionately postpone their own achievement of

nirvana to assist other beings in their own process to achieve this liberation. The celestial *bodhisattvas*

> can intervene miraculously in the world, and can even create heavenly realms where people may be reborn into bliss for reasons that depend as much on the compassion of the *bodhisattvas* as on the merit of the individual worshipper. At the end of their careers as *bodhisattvas* they become "celestial *buddhas*" and attain even more remarkable powers.[6]

Among the most important of these *bodhisattvas* are Avalokiteshvara (who embodies the compassion of the Buddha and is worshiped in Japan and China as the female deity Kannon or Guan Yin), Maitreya (the future-age Buddha), Manjushri (the *bodhisattva* of wisdom), and Kshitigarbha (who consoles and protects.)

Among the most revered of celestial *buddhas* is Amitabha (the *buddha* of Infinite Light), who is believed to have established a Pure Land paradise in the western heavens where his faithful followers will be reborn. Pure Land Buddhism is one of the most influential branches of later Mahayanist developments; it has roots in India but was developed especially in China from the fifth century CE and also became enormously popular in Japan during the 12th century and later. Pure Land Buddhism is often seen as a more accessible and popular form for both lay and monastic practitioners. Adherents to this form of Buddhism rely extensively on chanting and repeated invocations of the name of Amitabha Buddha. Pure Land Buddhists believe that prayers faithfully directed to Amitabha will be accepted compassionately by the deity, who is often visualized and depicted as residing in a magnificent universe.

Meditation practices are especially emphasized in the Ch'an (Chinese) and Zen (Japanese) branches of Buddhism. According to traditions, Ch'an practices were brought to China from India in the late fifth century CE by the legendary figure known as Bodhidharma (whose name means "Enlightened Tradition"). Ch'an Buddhism was later conveyed to Korea and Japan. There are numerous branches (for example, Soto and Rinzai) of this style of Buddhism, many of which rely extensively on practices of rigorous disciplined and formal sitting meditation (*zazen*) to still the mind and allow insights and enlightenment to arise directly. Order and simplicity designed to provide quiet harmony and minimal distractions are especially characteristic of Zen aesthetics, well demonstrated, for example, in the style of "dry gardening" seen at the Ryoan-ji Temple in Kyoto, Japan (see Figure 13.1).

Colorful imagery and complex iconography are, in contrast, especially characteristic of Tantric (or Vajrayana, Thunderbolt or Diamond Vehicle) Buddhism, which emphasizes elaborate ritual practices and visually aided meditation on esoteric symbols and diagrams designed to assist adherents in attaining immediate experiences and stages of awakening and enlightenment. Tantric practices have roots in ancient India also and were especially developed later in Tibet

and Nepal as well as in Japan—as Shingon Buddhism. Vajrayana Buddhists also have their own sets of sacred scriptures and have developed into several distinct schools.

Buddhism spread very widely and was avidly transmitted by missionary activity in Asian regions outside of India during the many centuries following the lifetime of the Buddha. It should certainly be noted that Buddhism today has also developed a significant body of adherents in the West—in Europe and America.[7] Buddhist practices, of diverse types, have been transmitted to and transformed via their adoption by, and adaptation to, a great many cultures. The many forms of Buddhism, nevertheless, all represent approaches to the principal teachings of the Buddha about the possibility of achieving enlightenment via ethical behavior and via the development of wise attitudes reflective of an awareness of the realities of human life in the cosmos.



Figure 13.1 Ryoan-ji Temple, garden, late 15th century, Kyoto, Japan. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Buddhist art and architecture is as multivariant as the many different world venues into which the religion has spread. From the birthplace of Buddhism in India, the religion spread rapidly to many other Asian regions, adapting to and adopting local building and iconographic traditions and, in turn, adding to the development of indigenous styles of art and architecture. "One of the keys to the success of the religion was the ability of Buddhism to adapt to and evolve within different cultures and their existing beliefs. . . . Buddhist art serves to remind, to support and to reinforce the eternal truths of the religion, and its development and style remain integral to the history of the religion, the two not being easily separated."[8]

It is possible to approach the study of Buddhist art and architecture through a variety of lenses. A traditional chronological survey focusing on the development of specific styles in architecture, sculpture, and painting reveals a consistently evolving diversity as the religion spread from India through Asia and beyond. Similarly, studies that focus on the development of specifically Buddhist symbols and narrative imagery will reveal a diversity not only in the use of aniconic symbols but also in the ways of representing the Buddha himself.

Some symbols, forms, materials, and styles of art are particularly characteristic of specific world regions and different branches of Buddhism. These art forms and styles reflect different doctrinal emphases and differing liturgical practices. For example, Theravadan Buddhist art generally tends to focus attention on the life and deeds of the historical Buddha (and the *jataka* narratives—stories of his previous lives), whereas Mahayana Buddhist art developed an expansive visual vocabulary of celestial Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and realms of heavenly paradises.[9] The arts associated with the Vajrayana schools are especially rich in complex symbols and images reflective of the esoteric Tantric teachings and use of art in ritual practices. "Thus, the Buddhist religion, despite having a founder who had. . . . preached a doctrine against material possessions, acquired the world's richest and most varied system of visual support."[10]

Although, as wisely stated, "to many students of Buddhism and its arts, the task of deciphering Buddhist iconography and symbolism can seem as challenging as the search for enlightenment itself,"[11] there is nevertheless some degree of consistency in this diversity. Sacred sites of Buddhist pilgrimage in India were identified soon after the Buddha's death, and tradition recounts that the Buddha himself gave directions about the dispersal of his bodily relics during his final sermon to his disciples before his death (or final transcendence, *parinirvana*). He directed his followers to place his cremated remains into funeral mounds (or *stupas*), which would serve as memorials of his life and teaching and provide focal sites for meditation and pilgrimage. Although no visible evidence remains of these purportedly eight original Buddhist memorials (presently existing structures on the sites all date to later centuries), it is extremely significant to note that the concepts of marking sacred sites with physical structures, and the activity of making pilgrimages to visit these sites, have played a critical role in Buddhist practices through the centuries. "For the Buddha, pilgrimage was a spiritual practice capable of easing the heart, bringing happiness and taking the practitioner to a heaven-realm. Relics and pilgrimage monuments, such as *stupas*, were important as the material focus of such spiritual activity."[12]

In certain senses, it could be said that all Buddhist art has similar commemorative and symbolic purposes. Stupas mark and create sacred sites; they serve as symbols of the Buddha and his teachings, and the entire cosmos is also symbolized in a stupa. Symbols have always played a critical role in Buddhist art, and it appears that for the first several centuries after the Buddha's lifetime, symbols were primarily used to refer to the Buddha and his teachings and to represent the objects venerated at the sacred sites of Buddhist pilgrimage.

> This was not due to an explicit prohibition of images during these centuries. . . . It is due to the nature of early Buddhism and its Indian background. The Buddha was essentially a reforming sage who taught truths about existence. . . . Like a prophet, he was embodied in his message and to "see" his word was to see him.[13]

Among the earliest and still most widespread and prevalent symbols in Buddhism are wheels, lions, lotus flowers, trees, and footprints (see Figures 13.2

and 13.3). The lion was a traditional Indian symbol of royalty and power and thus referred to the noble lineage of the Buddha as well as the immense power of his teachings (*dharma*). The *dharma* (law) itself is most often symbolized by a wheel—indicating that the teaching "is in constant motion and provides a path toward spiritual enlightenment and eventual release."[14] The Wheel of the Law may have differing numbers of spokes depending on the context and other symbolism intended; for example, an eight-spoked wheel references the Eightfold Path.



Figure 13.2 Lion capital, Asoka pillar at Sarnath, India, 273–32 BCE. The Art Archive.

Trees in Buddhist art refer to various events in the life of the Buddha, primarily his attainment of enlightenment under the *bodhi* tree at Bodh Gaya. The lotus flower is also an extremely important Buddhist symbol of spiritual purity and enlightenment, for "just as the lotus flower rises up from the depths of muddy ponds and lakes to blossom immaculately above the water's surface, the human heart or mind can develop the virtues of the Buddha and transcend desires and attachments."[15]

Reminders of the path to enlightenment, for those who aspire to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha, are frequently found in the form of carved stone footprints of the Buddha. Legends tell that the Buddha, shortly before his death, left his footprints impressed into stone as a deliberate memorial of his life and teachings. Like stupas, footprints of the Buddha are ubiquitous visual symbols found wherever Buddhism itself has traveled. The footprints, of course, also serve as reminders of the physical journeys of the Buddha during his decades of teaching and traveling in northern India.

Representations of the Buddha in human form do not appear to have developed until about the first century BCE. Much discussion has been devoted to the questions of "when, where, and why" the first images of the physical Buddha were created.[16] The explanations are doubtless multifaceted. The rich iconography associated with Hinduism in India and the related *bhakti* or devotional practices involving veneration of images, the influence from figural styles associated with Greco-Roman art in the Gandhara region of northern India,[17] the



Figure 13.3 Footprints of the Buddha, limestone panel from the Great Stupa at Amaravati, India, first century BCE. London: British Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

spread of Buddhism generally with larger and more settled monastic communities plus its growing widespread appeal to the laity, and perhaps most significantly, the development of Mahayana Buddhist schools are all factors that have been cited as contributory in the further elaboration of figural and narrative Buddhist art.[18]

The veneration and worship of the Buddha as a sacred being, characteristic of the popular piety associated with the Mahayana schools, may be the most significant factor in the growth and proliferation of Buddha images, as well as the expanding Buddhist pantheon in general. In painting and sculpture, the image of the Buddha rapidly takes on specific standard forms and develops an iconographic vocabulary of attributes and hand gestures (*mudras*) that symbolize particular qualities of the Buddha or that refer to events in his life. The *mudras* ultimately derive from Hindu traditions but were adapted to suit Buddhist needs. They include gestures indicating teaching, protection, and reassurance, as well as the distinctive "turning the wheel of the law," or *Dharmachakra-mudra,* and the *Bhumisparsha-mudra,* or "touching the earth," a gesture that Buddha performed at the moment of his enlightenment.

Paintings and sculptures of the Buddha have been abundantly produced through the centuries. Although these images may be primarily understood as reminders and symbols of the Buddha and his teachings, images also often serve as objects of devotion in and of themselves.[19] This is akin to some Hindu practices involving anointing, bathing, and offering food and gifts to statues of deities housed in shrines and temples.[20]

The practice, characteristic of early Buddhism, of enclosing a stupa in a worship or assembly (*chaitya*) hall in a monastery eventually burgeoned into the creation of very elaborate temples filled with numerous Buddha images. The forms and styles of Buddhist temple architecture (both associated with monastic complexes or independent of monasteries) reflect the regional building practices of the Asian regions to which the religion spread (see Figures 13.4 and 13.5). In Japan and China, traditional wooden construction techniques are used, and large Buddhist monastery complexes often have many different structures, assembly halls, pagodas (derived from the *stupa* form plus regional styles of secular gate and watch towers as well as religious ritual towers), dwell-



Figure 13.4 Todaiji Temple, Hall of the Great Buddha; founded 743, rebuilt in the 18th century, Nara, Japan. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

ing quarters for monks, facilities for visitors, and so on. The layout and enclosures of these complexes often mirror imperial or palace styles as well, with, for example, large halls filled with Buddha images in a form resembling the style of imperial audience halls.



Figure 13.5 Auspicious Light Pagoda, 3rd century, rebuilt 12th century, Suzhou, China. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.

EXAMPLES

Two Great Stupas: The Great Stupa at Sanchi, India, Third to First Centuries BCE and Borobudur, Java, ca. 800 CE

The site of Sanchi, in central India, provides some of the earliest and most important evidence of the development and forms of early Buddhist art (see Figure 13.6). The site is traditionally associated with the Mauryan Emperor Asoka (c. 279–32 BCE), who is of extreme significance in Buddhist history for his conversion to and support of Buddhism. Asoka, after his highly successful military campaigns (which preceded his conversion to Buddhism and adoption of



Figure 13.6 Great Stupa at Sanchi, India, third to first century BCE. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

nonviolent policies), came to rule over a large territory in central and southern India. His political and cultural influence extended widely. Not only did Asoka support Buddhism as the official state religion, but he also actively promoted Buddhist missionary work. Tradition tells that his own son and daughter were among the Buddhist missionaries sent to Sri Lanka.

Asoka is also credited with having been an art patron of overwhelming magnitude. Legends tell that he directed the creation of over 84,000 Buddhist memorials throughout his kingdom. Admittedly, this number is improbable—and only a few examples from his period survive to the present day, including the Great Stupa at Sanchi. *Stupa* is a Sanskrit term for mound or artificial mountain. The form can partially be traced to the practice of erecting funerary memorials over the grave sites of important rulers and Hindu holy men. Of course, the architectural marking of the burial sites of significant figures has a long history in the religious and political practices of many world regions, and marking important sites with physical memorials is a cross-cultural phenomenon. The stupa is, however, one of the most distinctive and common forms of Buddhist architecture and is the foundation for many later Buddhist architectural forms, such as pagodas (characteristic of Buddhist architecture in China and Japan) and the distinctive Tibetan *chorten* form, plus variations in Thailand, Indonesia, and elsewhere.[21]

It is somewhat problematic to describe a stupa as a form of architecture, however, because stupas (of whatever size) are not buildings into which people can enter. In contrast, stupas are fully solid structures, generally formed of mounded rubble covered with stones, brick, or plaster, and their function is to mark sacred places, serve as relic-containing memorials of holy figures, and symbolize religious concepts. The Great Stupa at Sanchi is a large, excellent exemplar of the form. It is close to 120 feet in diameter and 54 feet tall. One walks around (circumambulates) the exterior of the stupa on a specified (clockwise) devotional path, but one does not enter into any architecturally enclosed or roofed interior space. Access to the sacred precincts of a stupa is often signaled by gates (*torana*) set in a surrounding fence-enclosure. After visitors pass through the gates and enter the precincts, they make their way around the *stupa* on a ground-level path or slightly elevated platform. Stupas are generally topped with distinctive elements—a cubical form (*harmika*) and a shaft (*yasti*) that supports one or more umbrella-like disks (*chatra*). These are placed at the apex of the *stupa* and symbolize the axis of the world or cosmic world mountain (Mount Meru), which is at the center of the universe.[22] The relics are placed deep inside the stupa in line with the *yasti*.

The sculptured gates that give access to the Great Stupa at Sanchi are also remarkable survivals from the early eras of Buddhism in India. The 35-foot-tall gates were set at the four cardinal points, symbolizing the cosmos, and are enriched with narrative and symbolic sculptures that demonstrate the development of Buddhist imagery as well as the adaptation of traditional Hindu forms. The creation and sculptural elaboration of these gates is traced to the post-Asokan era, in the first century BCE, giving evidence of the continued importance of this site.

A number of other stupas were also erected at Sanchi, several of which survive today in somewhat fragmentary condition. The site appears to have functioned as a very significant center of Buddhist pilgrimage and monastic retreat under the initial patronage of the Emperor Asoka. Later additions and re-buildings on the site appear to have taken place up until the 11th and 12th centuries CE, after which the site was abandoned during the decline of Buddhism in India and its spread to other Asian regions.

The continued importance of the stupa form in Buddhism and its later development and elaboration are extremely well demonstrated by the great monument of Borobudur on the island of Java, Indonesia[23] (see Figures 13.7 and 13.8). This impressive monument was constructed in the early ninth century and is still today considered to be the largest Buddhist structure in the world. Created under the direction of the Shailendra rulers, this unique and well-studied monument is unlike any other in size and complexity of symbolism. It serves not only as a memorial to the Shailendra rulers and their devotion to Buddhism but also as a visual representation of core Buddhist teachings.

The floor plan of Borobudur shows its complex mandala-like layout. The square structure is placed on top of a low hill and rises upward in a shape resembling



Figure 13.7 Borobudur, Java, ca. 800 CE. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

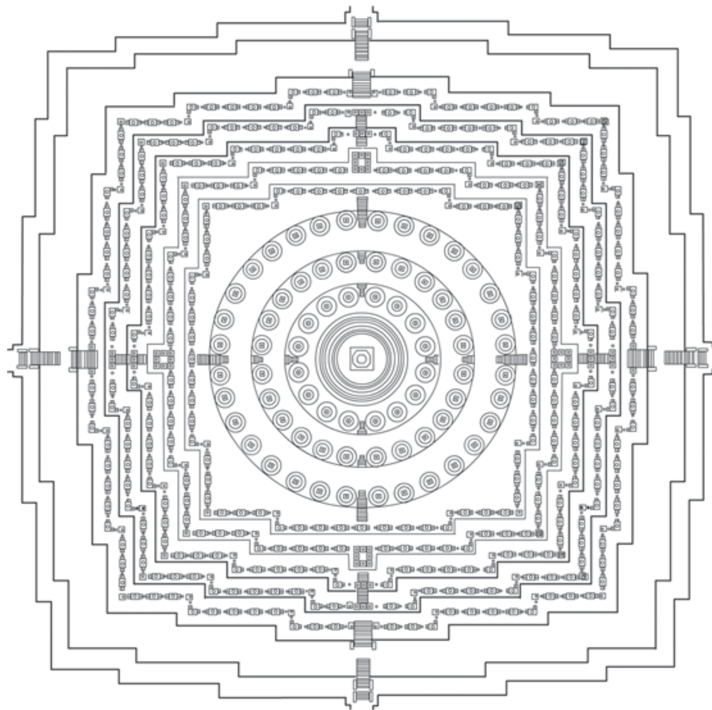


Figure 13.8 Borobudur, Java ca. 800 CE, floorplan. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.

a stepped pyramid. There are nine levels that the visitor ascends via staircases and walled galleries. The top three levels are circular, and the apex of the monument is topped with a large stupa. Borobudur is, itself, a *stupa,* but it contains a number of smaller *stupas* (72 on the three upper levels) filled with seated Buddha sculptures. Altogether there are over 500 free-standing Buddha figures plus several miles of elaborate relief carving on the base and middle terraces.

Borobudur dramatically symbolizes the Buddhist path from ignorance and attachment to enlightenment and release via the physical ascent of pilgrims to the apex of the monument and via the subjects found in the carvings on the different levels. The base represents the sphere of earthly desire, with relief carvings of various human actions and their causes and consequences. The middle four levels (where the majority of relief carvings are found) depict scenes from the life of the Buddha and other stories of spiritual quests. These levels represent the sphere of forms. The three upper levels symbolize the world of formlessness—the highest sphere. Thus, in journeying to and ascending Borobudur, "the visitor is transported by powerful, mystical forces that combine to make this enormous creation a remarkable evocation of earthly and divine worlds."[24]

Three Buddhas and Two Bodhisattvas

Three different free-standing sculptures of the Buddha from different world regions demonstrate some consistencies as well as divergences in form, style, and symbolism. Both the Great Bronze Buddha, from the middle of the 13th century, originally created for an important temple near Kamakura in Japan, and the much smaller bronze Buddha from 13th-century Thailand show specific types of seated Buddhas in meditation poses. The hand gestures (*mudras*) of the two seated Buddhas, as well as the sixth- or seventh-century Chinese standing Vairochana Buddha, represent standardized and oft-repeated forms.

The Japanese example shows Buddha in the *dhyana-mudra* pose, seated in intense meditation with closed eyes (see Figure 13.9). His large hands rest on his legs, palms upward with thumbs touching. This gesture refers to Buddha's long period of meditation preceding his enlightenment, and it is one of the most frequent forms of images of the Buddha. The pose was used for representations of the historical Buddha as well as the many important celestial Buddhas of the Mahayana schools, such as, as in this case, Amida (or Amitabha) Buddha (the Buddha of Infinite Light, especially venerated in the Pure Land traditions). This colossal, hollow bronze sculpture is close to 40 feet tall.

Although similar in basic format, the 13th-century seated Buddha from Thailand exhibits the *bhumisparsha* (touching the earth) *mudra,* indicating the moment of Buddha's enlightenment when "he called the earth to witness his good achievement"[25] (see Figure 13.10). Although still wrapped in stoic meditation, this Buddha reaches one hand downward to touch the earth with his fingertips. The slimmer and elongated body proportions of this Buddha are



Figure 13.9 Seated Amida Buddha, bronze, ca. 1252, Kotukuin, Kamakura, Japan. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 13.10 Seated Buddha, bronze, 13th century, Thailand. Paris: Musée Guimet. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

typical of the images produced in Thailand during the period of the Sukhothai kingdom. The flame-like protuberance on the top of Buddha's head is also characteristic of this style. The protuberance (*ushnisha*) is a distinctive aspect of Buddha images generally, probably derived from the Indian royal hairstyle of topknot and/or turban. Other distinctive physical marks of the Buddha include a small dot or whorl of hair in the middle of his forehead (the *urna*, which symbolizes great wisdom) and his elongated earlobes. These represent another mark of nobility, resultant from the wearing of heavy jewelry (which of course the Buddha had discarded), and serve as a reminder that we also must leave behind attachment to worldly riches in order to attain enlightenment.

These features can also be seen in the sixth- or seventh-century Chinese bronze example of a standing Buddha (see Figure 13.11). A variety of types and poses were developed for standing Buddha figures also. This example shows Vairochana, the cosmic Buddha or Illuminator. He is shown with one palm raised and the other hand reaching towards the viewer, demonstrating the *vitarka-mudra* of teaching, welcome, and reassurance.

A range of forms and styles is also well demonstrated in depictions of the numerous *bodhisattvas*. Among the most popular and widely worshiped, in various guises, throughout the Buddhist world is Avalokiteshvara (the Protector of the World, Bodhisattva of Compassion). This figure can appear in dozens of different forms, of which the two illustrated here represent only two major types. This deity has an especially interesting history and evolution.[26] Venerated as a male deity in Indian Buddhism,

> Avalokiteshvara became associated with a female bodhisattva called Tara, who embodied the feminine side of his compassion. In China, where Avalokiteshvara is worshiped under the name Guanyin, the bodhisattva's male and female identities became compounded and Guanyin came to be worshiped mainly in female form. Tibetans feel a special kinship for Avalokiteshvara. . . . They claim that he has taken a vow to protect the nation of Tibet and is manifested in the person of every Dalai Lama.[27]



Figure 13.11 Standing Buddha Vairochana, bronze, 581–618 CE, China. The Art Archive / Musée Guimet Paris / Gianni Dagli Orti.

The beautifully painted 11th- to 12th-century wooden example from China shows the goddess in elaborate and elegantly flowing robes, seated casually with one knee drawn up and arm resting lightly atop the knee (see Plate 25). This pose is often called "royal ease," and—versus more formal and sometimes frightening depictions of deities—it conveys balance, relaxation, calmness, warmth, and welcome to all who call upon her merciful nature.[28]

A much more startling depiction of this deity is the 17th-century Tibetan example illustrated in Figure 13.12. The figure is seated in a lotus pose of meditation, with two hands placed together across the chest in the *anjali mudra* of prayer. Numerous additional arms radiate out from the figure, and the multiple hands demonstrate a variety of other *mudras* or hold various ritual objects. This symbolizes the *bodhisattva* with 1,000 arms (other examples will show 11 heads, 6 arms, and so on), indicating the deity's limitless powers and endless different ways to assist and lead all to enlightenment. The exquisitely detailed and precious nature of this gem-encrusted bronze statuette is typical of the arts associated with the esoteric Vajrayana schools of Tibetan Buddhism.



Figure 13.12 Avalokiteshvara, bronze and semi-precious stones, 17th century. Tibet: Werner Forman / Art Resources, NY.

A Tibetan Mandala, 15th Century

"No subject in Tibetan art has drawn more attention than the mandala. These works have an appeal beyond their original liturgical role; to psychologists they are universal images that reflect fundamental human instincts, while, for many, they attract through their blend of order and harmony and their multiple levels of mystery."[29] For many centuries, the arts of Tibet were relatively inaccessible to and unstudied by Western scholars. But especially following the Chinese takeover of Tibet in the mid-20th century and the resultant diaspora of Tibetans and their art objects, a vast amount of Tibetan art materials have been collected, studied, and displayed in the West.[30] Many studies—both popular and scholarly—have been devoted to all aspects of Tibetan art, with mandalas being among the most prominent sources of fascination and wide-ranging interpretation (see Plate 26).

Mandalas are not unique to Tibet or to Buddhism; they are used in Hindu and Jain religious practices and have been widely produced in India and throughout Asia generally.[31] Many would argue that the symmetrical diagram format of the mandala has an archetypal kinship with many other cross-cultural forms,

such as labyrinths and the rose windows of medieval European cathedrals. The term mandala is said to derive from Sanskrit words meaning a "sacred center," "container," "essence," and something "set apart."[32] Mandalas, thus, are sacred diagrams that represent the cosmos, universe, paradises, and abodes of deities. They exist in both two- and three-dimensional forms and are used by practitioners as aids in visualizing and in communicating with deities who are able to assist with the search for enlightenment.

Typically, mandalas are highly complex symmetrical diagrams with circles, squares, and other geometric forms filled with images of deities and esoteric symbols. The 17th-century Tibetan example illustrated shows a mandala painted in watercolor on cloth, mounted on a cloth background. This hanging scroll (or *thangka*) format is very typical of portable mandalas, which could be displayed and used as aids in meditation and visualization practices.[33]

This particular example shows the "palace architecture" format, a style of mandala that became especially popular in Tibet in the 12th and 13th centuries and that grew in complexity of style through the 14th and 15th centuries, when this example was created. This work was produced in a monastery of the Sakya order, one of the major orders of Tibetan Buddhism.[34] The Sakya order was especially active in the production of sacred art and in maintaining and classifying the formats and styles of mandalas. The "palace architecture" type is meant to be understood and experienced as the two-dimensional floor plan for a multifaceted, three-dimensional structure. Set within the inner circle and visually entered through elaborate gateways at the four cardinal points, the square palace itself, in this case, contains six smaller palaces or mansions that are inhabited by deities. These deities are identified as six *chakravartins* (world rulers or kings) accompanied by female consorts in "father-mother" or *yab-yum* pose. This particular iconography of deities in sexual union, so frequent in Tibetan art, is "not meant to be regarded sensually. Rather, they are symbolic of the union of wisdom (female) and compassion (male), the two qualities necessary to achieve enlightenment."[35]

The gates and corners of the large palace are guarded by eight fearsome female deities, and these and other deities are repeated again in rows on the top and bottom of the mandala. Twenty additional deities are found in circles in the corners of the composition, plus various symbols and ritual objects. Elaborately detailed foliage scrolls in traditional and symbolic color schemes are repeated throughout the background, the palace, and the mansions. The specific proportions and layouts for mandalas adhere to standard conventions and maintain these fixed traditions due to their spiritual potency.

> Each figure in a mandala has several purposes, functioning as a specific deity, as a manifestation of the central deity's power, as a focus of visualization and meditation, and as a signpost for a spiritual process. Each plays many roles during rites and visualizations which presumes a constant dialogue between the deity at the heart of the mandala (and in its various components) and the practitioner who

moves, at least metaphorically, from outside the mandala to its core. On this journey he encounters the various forces radiating from the inside out, identifies with the central deity, apprehends all manifestations as parts of a single whole, and moves closer to the goal of perfect understanding or enlightenment.[36]

NOTES

1. Some branches of Buddhism accept slightly different birth and death dates for the Buddha; for example, in southeast Asian traditions, his dates may be charted as 623–543 BCE.

2. Vasudha Narayanan, "Hinduism," in *Eastern Religions: Origins, Beliefs, Practices, Holy Texts, Sacred Places,* ed. Michael Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

3. Malcolm Eckel, "Buddhism," in *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions,* ed. Michael Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 181.

4. For information on the Bon religion, see Christoph Baumer, *Tibet's Ancient Religion: Bon* (Trumbull, CT: Weatherhill, 2002); and Per Kvaerne, *The Bon Religion of Tibet: The Iconography of a Living Tradition* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

5. Needless to say, the Buddha, in his practical fashion, also specified the details of these four truths and eight goals much more fully, and masses of later commentary have been devoted to analysis and understanding of these. A very useful summary may be found in Huston Smith and Philip Novak, *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003), 31–49.

6. Eckel, 176.

7. Smith and Novak, 123–83.

8. Robert Fisher, *Buddhist Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 8.

9. Joji Okazaki, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1977).

10. Fischer, 10.

11. Meher McArthur, *Reading Buddhist Art: An Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 8.

12. Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 172.

13. Albert Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 142.

14. McArthur, 123.

15. McArthur, 125.

16. Susan Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (1990), 401–8.

17. The complex discussion surrounding the influence of Western figural styles on Buddhist art and the interpretations of these decades-long and still ongoing scholarly debates are well covered by Stanley Abe, "Inside the Wonder House: Buddhist Art and the West," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism,* ed. Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 63–106.

18. For early narrative art, see Patricia Karetzky, *The Life of the Buddha: Ancient Scriptural and Pictorial Traditions* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992).

19. Donald Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual Image Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

20. Donald Lopez, ed., *Buddhism in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

21. Anna Dallapiccola, ed., *The Stupa: Its Religious, Historical, and Architectural Significance* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980).

22. I. W. Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," *History of Religions* 23, no. 1 (1983): 64–83.

23. Luis Gomez, *Barabudur: History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument* (Berkeley: Regents of the University of California, 1981).

24. Fisher, 197.

25. Moore, 151.

26. The bibliography on Kuan Yin is extensive. See John Blofeld, *Bodhisattva of Compassion: The Mystical Tradition of Kuan Yin* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1978); and Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

27. Eckel, 176.

28. A very poignant, personal description of a contemporary woman's first encounter with a very similar statue of Kwan Yin can be found in Sandy Boucher, *Discovering Kwan Yin, Buddhist Goddess of Compassion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 2–3.

29. Fisher, 82.

30. Donald Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

31. Okazaki, 37–64.

32. Fisher, 82; McArthur, 73; and Denise Leidy and Robert Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment* (New York and Boston: Asia Society Galleries, Tibet House, and Shambhala, 1997), 9.

33. A helpful and readable description of these meditation and visualization practices can be found in John Blofeld, *The Tantric Mysticism of Tibet: A Practical Guide* (New York: Causeway Books, 1974). For more information on the materials and techniques of *thangka* painting, see David and Janice Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1988).

34. The major orders of Tibetan Buddhism are the Nyingma (founded in the 8th century); Kardam, Sakya, and Kagyu (all founded in the 11th century); and Gelug (founded in the 14th century).

35. Barbara Lipton and Nima Ragnubs, *Treasures of Tibetan Art: Collections of the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32.

36. Leidy and Thurman, 4.

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—14—

Taoism

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Taoism (or Daoism) is a complex and multifaceted philosophical and religious system with origins in ancient China. It has a very lengthy history, has developed numerous aspects and different branches, and is still practiced in various forms today. The ultimate origins of Taoism are shrouded in mystery and mythology. Some traditions credit the legendary or semi-historical Yellow Emperor of ancient China (Huangdi or Huang Ti, ca. 2000 BCE) with establishing many aspects of civilization, culture, and religious practices that ultimately formed the foundations for later developments in Chinese religious history, including Taoism. Many of the beliefs and practices associated with Taoism thus significantly predate the teachings and writings attributed to the scholar Lao Tzu (or Lao Zi), who is said to have lived in the sixth to fifth century BCE. His name means "old teacher," "old master," or "wise old man." Some consider him to have been an actual historical person, an older contemporary of Confucius (ca. 551–479 BCE), whereas others believe he is simply a legendary (or semi-legendary) figure. Lao Tzu is often considered to be the founder of Taoism, although it might be much more accurate to describe him as the most well-known name in a long line of ancient philosophers whose teachings provide the basis for Taoism (see Figure 14.1).

According to traditions, late in his life Lao Tzu became disenchanted with the social and political situation in which he worked in China as a minor government official and decided to leave the country and travel to central Asia, in order to devote his remaining years to quiet meditation and study. On his way



Figure 14.1 Chinese scroll painting, 17th century, Lao Tzu and his servant. Paris: Bibliothèque National. Snark / Art Resource, NY.

out of the country, he was stopped by a border guard or customs official, Yin Hsi, who recognized his wisdom and who asked him to write down his ideas and teachings. Lao Tzu did so, purportedly in a matter of just a few days, and this text is known as the *Tao Te Ching* (*Daode jing*—often translated as *The Way and Its Power*). This work is considered to be the first and still preeminent Taoist text. Although Lao Tzu is traditionally credited with the authorship of this work, it is much more likely that the *Tao Te Ching* was actually composed and edited over time by several different contributors, reaching its final form in the fourth to second centuries BCE (see Figure 14.2).

The *Tao Te Ching* is a relatively short but very dense and comprehensive treatise on the position of humans in the universe, the nature of reality, the ultimate meaning of human life, and the proper actions and attitudes required to achieve and maintain harmony in life, in society, and in the natural world. It has been described as a book that "can be read in half an hour or a lifetime."[1] It is a highly poetic and metaphorical work consisting of a series of often terse statements concerning the Tao—the indescribable guiding principle of the universe—and the fundamental importance of seeking and maintaining harmony with the Tao. The text advises simplicity in life and recommends the



Figure 14.2 Scribes copying the *Tao Te Ching* and presenting it to the Emperor. Paris: Bibliothèque National. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

avoidance of contentious and ambitious striving and useless activity of any sort that goes against nature, the Tao. Power and virtue (*Te*) will, instead, be achieved via *wu wei* (which can be translated as "non-action" or "unmotivated action"). The *Tao Te Ching* is a much-studied work, still highly popular (and popularized) today, and can be seen as a combination of social and political philosophy, ethical guidance, poetic mysticism, and religious teaching.

Other important Taoist texts, such as the fourth- to third-century *Book of Zhang Zi* (composed by disciples of Zhang Zi, who lived ca. 369–286 BCE) and the much later *Book of Lie Zi* (ca. 300 CE) continue and expand the fundamental themes of the *Tao Te Ching* while adding more popular tales and anecdotes. This also reflects the gradual development of Taoism as a religious system (with specific sets of beliefs and practices, a pantheon of deities, a priesthood, temples and monasteries, and related art) that took place in China largely during the second and third centuries CE, especially after the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE. Previous to this, Confucianism had become the official state religion, and Taoism was considered to be a complementary and largely philosophical movement. Many scholars thus separate "philosophical Taoism" from "religious Taoism," although in practice the distinction is far from clear cut. "Much ink has been spilled on this matter, but usually, it must be admitted, by people who have not studied the texts of 'religious Taoism.' "[2]

The founder of religious Taoism is traditionally said to have been the scholar and healer Zhang Daoling, who, in the middle of the second century (142 CE), had a vision of "the personified god of the Tao, Taishang laojun, the Highest Venerable Lord. This deity is the Tao, but also a mythological development of the ancient philosopher Laozi."[3] This mystical and deified Lao Tzu communicated directly with him in a series of revelations. Zhang Daoling is credited with founding the Taoist sect known as the Way of the Celestial (or Heavenly) Masters (or Orthodox Unity), which remained a major branch of Taoism for many centuries and is still active today.[4] Other Taoist sects soon developed, such as the school of Highest Clarity (Shangqing), which was founded in the late fourth century,[5] and the school of Numinous Treasure (Lingbao.)[6]

The introduction of Buddhism from India to China in the second century CE also had an enormous impact on the development of religious Taoism and Taoist art. Taoism was seen as a native or indigenous tradition, although Taoists adopted and modified several aspects of Buddhism to suit their own needs and enhance their own followings. It is at this point also that many popular legends arose about the life of Lao Tzu, for example, that he was able to prolong his life greatly through spiritual and meditation practices, that he had met Confucius (who was very impressed with the "truth" of his teachings), and that after his departure from China, he spread the word of the Tao widely (including converting the Buddha to Taoism, or himself becoming the Buddha.)[7]

Religious Taoism ultimately grew into several different schools, branches, or sects, some of which placed special emphasis on religious ritual, practices of meditation, and other physical and sexual exercises to promote harmony with the Tao and to achieve longevity. External practices (involving the occult, magic, divination, and alchemy) also characterize religious Taoism and have played a very significant role in the development of Chinese medicine and martial arts. Many of these Taoist practices were taken over from other much earlier Chinese traditions, especially those of the second- and first-century BCE "magico-technicians (*fangshi*),"[8] who were adept at the arts of healing, divination, and various mystical, magical, and alchemical endeavors.[9]

As religious Taoism developed, so did the pantheon of deities. Lao Tzu was elevated to the status of a god by the second century, and eventually, "the deified Laozi was identified with the Tao itself and credited with the creation of the universe."[10] Lao Tzu (as the Lord Lao) had appeared in a vision to Zhang Daoling, as mentioned previously, and the earliest record of Lao Tzu being formally worshiped as a divinity occurred in 165 or 166 CE when Emperor Huan "decided to perform . . . a sacrifice to Laozi and the Buddha, in a ceremony accompanied by the sacral music belonging to the semi-annual sacrifice to Heaven."[11] The deified Lao Tzu was joined quickly by many other deities, some of whom derived from much earlier native or folk traditions. The deities in this expanding pantheon were associated with specific geographical locales, natural phenomena, animals, stars and planets, various activities, and occupations. A number of historical (or semi-historical or completely legendary)

humans of special wisdom and holiness were also considered to have become immortal deities. Stories about the Taoist immortals are especially filled with brilliant and fantastic details about their abilities and magical powers.[12] "The Taoist pantheon is vast and has grown constantly over the centuries, with each school, each revelation, adding its own gods to the older ones, who have usually been retained rather than replaced."[13]

Religious Taoism continued to expand and was very popular in China through most of the medieval period. It was generally supported, with some periods of exception, by the imperial dynasties of the Tang (618–907), Song (960–1279), and Yuan (1276–1386) eras. The Tang emperors, because of their sharing of Lao Tzu's surname (Li), claimed to be his direct descendants and thus further legitimized their position as godly rulers. They founded and supported temples and monasteries and made the *Tao Te Ching* required reading for government employees. Confucianism was always a strong rival for imperial support, however, and in spite of mutual interchanges, Confucianism was often more in favor with the government. Additionally, Taoist–Buddhist relations have varied through the centuries from mutually supportive to downright hostile at times.

Of course, all religions in China suffered during the mid-20th-century rise of Communism, and during the Cultural Revolution, Taoism in particular was especially targeted, for its "superstitious" practices. Today, various forms of Taoism are practiced in China alongside various closely related "Chinese Community Traditions." Taoism remains highly popular in Taiwan and has developed European and American followers and variations as well.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

As mentioned earlier, many scholars distinguish "philosophical Taoism" from "religious Taoism." This distinction has much to do with how the original teachings and primary texts associated with Lao Tzu and his initial followers and commentators are regarded, as well as what regard is given to the later Taoist writings. The fundamental Taoist text, the *Tao Te Ching* is a highly complex, challenging, and extremely intriguing set of thought-provoking sayings about the nature of reality and human life. The *Tao Te Ching* recommends and demonstrates the wisdom and benefits to be gained from living in harmony with the Tao; it emphasizes certain modes of human attitude and behavior as being most beneficial to achieving the ideal state of being in harmony with the universe; it speaks about the values of non-contentious and non-gainfully-motivated action (*wu-wei*), and it offers readers, who may wisely choose to be open to the teachings, a set of ideas to consider carefully. It does not contain specific directions about worship practices or identify particular deities to be revered; it does not contain any specific commandments, rules, or set of strictly specified virtues that adherents are required to follow; instead, it makes a series of wise (and sometimes contradictory) assertions about the nature of life and the universe.

Thus, at the risk of oversimplifying, it could be said that Taoism evolved from a set of complex philosophical teachings into a religious system—which adherents were motivated to expand and codify by their need to have more specific information and directions about whom and what to venerate and how exactly to enact their beliefs by specific actions and practices. Hence, the "wise old sage" (Lao Tzu) ultimately became regarded as a deity, and in competition, assimilation, and coordination with Buddhist beliefs and practices, as well as Confucianism, Taoism developed into a religious system with a vast canon of holy scriptures and specific (but extremely diverse) religious rituals and practices. The *Tao Te Ching,* in religious Taoism, is thus regarded as a "revealed" text that offers religious teachings and revelations directly from the Tao—or God, the Lord Lao—in the form of the deified Lao Tzu.

> One of the most complicated aspects of Taoism is its transformation from a philosophy to a religion. The West is just beginning to become aware of the long history of religious Taoism. Even scholars who are familiar with Laozi and the *Daode jing* are generally unaware of the later history of religious Taoism . . . or of the role of this religion in Chinese political history.[14]

In the centuries after Lao Tzu and the composition of the *Tao Te Ching,* literally hundreds of independent Taoist texts were produced. By the mid-15th century, when the present Taoist canon (*Daozang*) was collected, it included well over one thousand volumes.[15] Many of these Taoist writings were also seen as divinely inspired: "the manifestation of the Tao on earth."[16] Founders of various Taoist sects were inspired by visions and revelations received from various deities and spirits in the ever-growing pantheon, and the texts they composed are esteemed and regarded as divine revelations. Other Taoist writings include biographies and hagiographies of worthy people and holy figures. Many texts recount tales of the Immortals—humans who, by various deeds and practices, achieved immortality and who perpetually reside in various heavenly realms. Some Taoist texts describe sacred places, holy mountains, important temples, monasteries and shrines, sites of physical pilgrimage, while other Taoist texts include information (often couched in arcane terms) on ritual, exorcism, healing, alchemy, divination, medicine, and meditation practices. This truly vast and complex variety of writings and practices may explain why the religious aspects of Taoism are often misunderstood and seen as "nothing more than superstition and folk religion."[17]

> Despite its influence on Chinese civilization, Taoism has been notoriously difficult to define—this is largely attributable to the many different and distinctive forms the tradition has adopted through its history. . . . The schools of Taoism have never been united under a central authority, and the development of systematic teachings has not been an overriding concern.[18]

Nevertheless, in spite of the complexity and diversity of Taoist teachings and the many different schools and practices, the belief that human life can

be enhanced and prolonged by living in harmony with the Tao is one of the fundamental principles of Taoism in general. This can be achieved in a variety of ways—via adopting a wise attitude toward life that involves awareness of the Tao and the principles of the complementary forces of *yin* and *yang*, via seeing the importance of maintaining harmony and balance in one's actions, and via demonstrating by action (and non-action) the Taoist goal of *wu-wei*. Such harmonious living, letting nature take its course, will result in contentment and enjoyment of life, rather than useless striving, contentious behavior, discontent, and unhappiness. The many benefits to be gleaned from such a desirable and enhanced life experience are obvious—achieving harmony with the nature of reality (the Tao) will necessarily result in a prolonged and happy life. So harmony with the Tao should be cultivated and maintained.

"To be alive is good; to be more alive is better; to be always alive is best."[19] This quest for longevity and immortality has been understood differently by various schools of Taoism through the centuries. The life-prolonging and life-enhancing techniques developed by many Taoist practitioners can be understood as having symbolic as well as literal goals. Taoist practitioners of various forms of internal and external alchemy may approach the quest for immortality in a mystical or physical or psychological sense, or with a combination of various understandings. Immortality can be understood as being free from earthly life and worldly limits; it can involve maintaining a sense of stability by going along with changes.[20]

> More than just a pattern of belief or a doctrine, Taoism is a way of life. . . . it has always remained the province of initiates who are the respectful possessors of revealed texts not divulged to the masses. Preaching plays no part in it, but replies are given to questions. . . . Taoism has evolved in a world apart, like those constructs in its meditations and ritual, a world always somehow marginal to society, within but testifying to another world beyond.[21]

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Taoist forms of art and architecture evolved as Taoism itself evolved in China over the course of many centuries. It is a matter of some scholarly discussion when the first specifically Taoist art appeared out of previous and parallel artistic traditions or whether or not the search to identify the first Taoist art is a useful scholarly endeavor.

> It is critical to remember that the meaning and content of Taoism have undergone many changes over the course of its long history. . . . any definition of Taoist art must be a historical and dynamic one, taking into account the continuity of this art as well as its specific manifestations in different places and times.[22]

Based on surviving evidence, art works that can be seen or clearly identified as specifically Taoist date only from the fourth or fifth centuries CE, when Taoism

had developed into a formal religious system rather than a purely philosophical movement. As a formal religion (albeit with different branches or schools) Taoism required architecture (temples and monasteries) and all manner of visual arts (painting, sculpture, calligraphy) in order not only to house monastic communities and provide worship spaces, but also to teach and offer insight and understanding into the often arcane and increasingly complex development of Taoist schools of thought and practices.

The visual arts have always played an extremely important role in religious Taoism, and Taoist teachings have had a great deal of influence on the development of Chinese art. The Taoist respect for nature and harmonious natural surroundings, for example, has had a great impact on the history of Chinese landscape painting and garden design, and Taoist temples and monasteries are often located in extremely beautiful surroundings on or near sacred mountains (see Figure 14.3). Taoist art, however, is closely related to Buddhist and Confucian art in China, and the forms and styles of the arts produced for all three of these continually intersecting traditions are often indistinguishable—and logically so, given that firm distinctions between these systems were most often not formally maintained. It is wise to remember that "Chinese religion is an amalgam of the 'Three Teachings' (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism) and the folk tradition. . . . In the modern era, just as in the past, rather than professing a single doctrinal affiliation most Chinese people draw simultaneously from elements of all the teachings."[23]



Figure 14.3 Chuan Long Tiong (Yellow Dragon Cave), Hang-zhou, Chekiang, China. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

The sharing of art styles and forms across traditions is well seen, for example, in Taoist architecture, which uses the same wooden-frame construction techniques typical of Chinese architecture through the ages. "If it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a particular work of art is Taoist, it is a far greater challenge to identify a Taoist building. . . . Taoist architecture, first and foremost, is part of the mainstream of the Chinese building tradition."[24] The basic principles of Chinese architectural construction, for both secular and religious buildings, involve the placement of spatial modules around courtyards and in axial layout. Post-and-beam construction is used, and tiled roof structures with overhanging eaves are often supported by a series of intricate wooden brackets. This type of wooden construction has remained consistent through centuries of Chinese architectural history. Certain periods, of course, are

characterized by specific styles of bracketing, roof profiles, sculptural elaboration, and painted decoration; and the importance or status of buildings and their patrons is evident by size, extensiveness, and degree of elaboration. Nevertheless, the style of grouping series of smaller structures into neat clusters arranged axially (north–south) and around courtyards does reflect Confucian concerns with demonstrating hierarchical patterns as well as Taoist concerns with harmonious living in nature. The careful placement and orientation of buildings and the arrangement of interior spaces reflect the practices of *feng shui*—the art of locating, orienting, and ordering space in such as way as to maximize positive energies (*ch'i*). *Feng shui* is not exclusively Taoist or demonstrated only in Taoist structures; it pervades Chinese architectural planning regardless of secular or religious context.

A variety of terms can apply to Taoist religious structures. The word *guan* often denotes a monastic temple complex; *gong* (palace) is the term often used for larger Taoist complexes; and smaller temples may be called *dao yuan* (Taoist courtyards). The larger temple complexes often contain scores of structures, including many individual halls and worship and offering areas devoted to the vast panoply of Taoist deities.

Some of the most impressive Taoist temple complexes are located on sacred mountains or near rivers and caves. These sites of natural beauty are believed to be especially powerful places where *ch'i* (energy) is focused. A number of mountains in China are generally considered sacred by the several related Chinese religions, whereas some mountains are especially associated with specific Taoist schools or branches. Many of these sites are major centers of pilgrimage—notably Mount T'ai, which has hundreds of shrines and temples, and the Abbey of the Holy Ancestor, founded on the site where Lao Tzu is said to have composed the *Tao Te Ching*.

In the same way that Taoist architecture follows the mainstream styles and materials of Chinese architecture generally, Taoist art also uses the same forms and styles of Buddhist, Confucian, and popular religious art in China. Through the centuries, much intermingling and sharing of symbolism and iconography took place. Some of the very earliest Taoist images per se date to the fifth century and depict the deified Lao Tzu accompanied by heavenly worthies (*tianzun*) in a manner that draws from earlier traditional Chinese depictions of deities and that also resembles Buddhist imagery.[25] Although literary evidence indicates that Lao Tzu had been worshiped as a deity as early as the second century CE, it seems that his visual presentation as a god was avoided at first.[26] The development of Taoist iconography was certainly influenced by previous religious imagery in China and, in turn, was influential on, as well as influenced by, Buddhist imagery.[27] Often Buddhist and Taoist images and themes are found together. The developing Taoist and Buddhist pantheons shared a number of gods and goddesses, although certain symbols and deities are more fundamentally Taoist in nature.

These include figures such as Yu Huangdi (or Yu-huang), the Jade Emperor, who derived from Chinese folk religion to become an extremely important



Figure 14.4 Boxwood pendant, China, 18th century. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

figure in religious Taoism, overseeing a vast heavenly administration. His cult became especially popular in the 11th century, and he is frequently depicted in art wearing imperial ceremonial robes and headdress. The Mother Empress of the West (Xiwangmu or Hsi-wang-mu) is the highest female deity in the Taoist pantheon and is most often shown in splendid imperial attire as well. Many Taoist deities are depicted wearing Chinese official or imperial costume, and men are frequently shown with beards. In contrast, Buddhist figures are more likely to be depicted in robes or monastic attire, and men are rarely bearded in Buddhist art.

The Eight Immortals, the Spirits of the Five Holy Mountains, city gods, local deities, warrior and guardian figures, and a great number of female deities make up the complex Taoist pantheon. The Eight Immortals have specific attributes by which they can be recognized. Other symbols traditionally associated with Taoism include the *yin-yang* and the Eight Trigrams (see Figure 14.4). The *yin-yang* symbolizes the universe with the two basic energies of *yin* (feminine, passive, receptive; associated with the moon, water, and clouds) and *yang* (masculine, active, creative; associated with the sun, fire, and dragons) in harmony and partaking of each other. The concept of *yin* and *yang* appears in the *I Ching* (or *Yi Jing;* the Book of Changes), an ancient Chinese manual on philosophy and divination. The complex process of divination described in the *I Ching* involves casting sticks, on which patterns of broken (*yin*) or unbroken (*yang*) lines are inscribed, into patterns. The Eight Trigrams represent the total possible combinations of groups of triads, which in turn are further combined in pairs (hexagrams—total of 64). The Eight Trigrams of the *I Ching* and the *yin-yang symbol,* although not exclusively Taoist, feature frequently in Taoist art.

EXAMPLES

The White Cloud Monastery, Beijing, 14th–15th Century

The White Cloud Monastery (or *Baiyun Guan*) is an extremely important Taoist complex in Beijing (see Figures 14.5, 14.6 and 14.7). It is the headquarters for the Quanzhen (or Ch'an-chen tao) school of Taoism (the Perfect Realization, or Complete Truth, or Way of the Realization of Truth), one of the two major Taoist sects surviving today.[28] This monastic branch of Taoism is said to have been founded in the middle of the 12th century (ca. 1167–68) by Wang Ch-un-yang (ca. 1112/23–70 CE), who was the recipient of secret teach-



Figure 14.5 The White Cloud Monastery, Beijing, China, 15th century, Sanqing and Siyu Halls. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.

ings received from two notable immortals. This school of Taoism combines and synthesizes elements from Taoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism with an emphasis on meditation and study in quiet and enclosed settings removed from the distractions of the external world.

The monastery is again today a functioning Taoist center.[29] Although it was established on the site earlier, most of the structures date to the 14th and 15th centuries when the complex was rebuilt under Ming imperial patronage. The buildings show the typical Chinese wood construction techniques, with overhanging eaves supported by elaborate brackets. It is an extensive complex of about 15 acres and is laid out on a narrow and rectangular north–south axis, again typical of Chinese architectural planning and siting. There are over 50 different halls of diverse sizes dedicated to various deities, ranged around seven major courtyards, plus living, study, and meditation areas for the monks and spaces for visitors. There are four main halls, among which is the hall dedicated to the Sanqing (or: San-ch'ing, the Three Pure Ones), who are major Taoist deities believed to inhabit different heavenly realms. The Heaven of Jade Purity is inhabited by the Lord of the Heavenly Jewel (or the Venerable Celestial One of the Original Beginning); the Heaven of Great Purity is inhabited by the Lord of the Tao; and the Heaven of Highest Purity is inhabited by the Supreme Master Lao (the deified Lao Tzu). The Three Pure Ones are venerated with offerings and incense; it is believed that incense smoke carries prayers directly to the deities.[30]



Figure 14.6 The White Cloud Monastery incense burner, Beijing, China, 15th century. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.

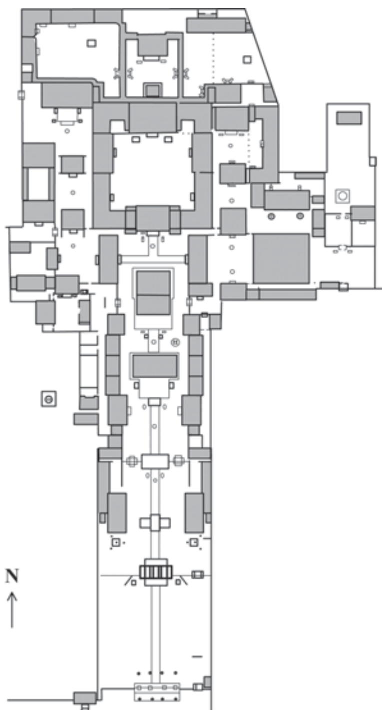


Figure 14.7 The White Cloud Monastery, Beijing, China, floorplan. Courtesy of Ricochet Productions.

Divine Immortals of the Five Paths and Transcendents Who Have Obtained the Tao, 1454

This hanging scroll, created of ink, colors, and gold on silk, is typical of the development of later Taoist imagery (see Plate 27). It dates from the mid-15th-century Ming period, and the extremely fine details and crisp, clear painting style are characteristic of imperial art production of the time. The scroll is part of a series of paintings that were designed for use by the imperial court in the Forbidden City in Beijing, specifically for a Buddhist-based ceremony known as the Water and Land Ritual (*Shuilu zhai*). This important religious rite was periodically held "for the universal salvation of all sentient beings . . . [and] . . . was intended to establish merit (*gong*) for both the living and the souls of the dead."[31]

Taoist deities and notables play prominent roles in this set of scrolls, evidencing the Taoist–Buddhist synthesis embraced by this era. This particular example features a group of Divine Immortals and Transcendents, human beings who, through careful study and practice of the Tao, became spiritually and physically

transformed; "they achieved realization (*zhen*) and a state of being beyond *yin* and *yang*."[32]

There is a vast body of literature on the Taoist immortals, and many lively tales describe their lives on earth and their different paths toward achievement of enlightenment. Many biographies (or hagiographies) of specific immortals exist, although the immortals are also understood to represent generic types, such as shown in this scroll. Several of the figures are wearing the distinctive headgear of Taoist priests; one of the figures is dressed in a garment of leaves (indicating that he is a hermit saint); others hold books and scrolls (indicating that they are scholars); and others hold plants and mushrooms (indicating their adeptness at the medicinal arts). One of the figures is accompanied by a three-legged toad, which clearly identifies him as Liu Haichan, a famous practitioner of inner alchemy who lived during the early 10th century and who is also associated with the Quanzhen—or Perfect Realization school of Taoism.

These immortals and transcendent beings are, befittingly, depicted as if they are floating above the world in a heavenly cloud-filled realm. At the same time, the variety of body types and facial details and the different costumes they wear emphasize a sense of their original earthly individuality as well.

Vase with the Eight Taoist Immortals, 14th Century

The Taoist immortals provide subject matter for art in a wide variety of media. This porcelain vase (Figure 14.8), produced in the 14th century, is an excellent example of the continued popularity of these figures. Although there are many Taoist tales of people who achieved immortality, a group of Eight Immortals was especially recognized by the 12th and 13th centuries, under the influence of the Quanzhen (Perfect Realization) school of Taoism. By the 15th century, whole temples were often dedicated to the Eight Immortals, the majority of whom were believed to have lived on earth during the 7th through 10th centuries.



Figure 14.8 Vase with the Eight Taoist Immortals, 14th century. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

Each one of the Eight Immortals is generally represented with specific iconography symbolic of their life on earth or other aspects of their biography and attainment of immortality. Han Xiang may be depicted with flowers or a flute; Lu Dongbin often holds a sword; Lan Caije may be shown with a basket of fruit; Zhang Guolao is often depicted with a bag

containing his magical mule, which could be folded up; and He Xian-gu (the only female immortal among the eight) is often shown with a basket of medicinal mushrooms or a lotus flower. They frequently appear as a group and were very popular during the Yuan dynasty when this porcelain vase was produced.

The creation of fine ceramics has a very lengthy history in China. This particular vase is an example of Longquan ware, which was highly valued in China and frequently exported as well. Longquan refers to the town in southeastern China where a number of workshops were highly active especially from the 10th through 17th centuries, creating the characteristic cool green, celadon-glazed pieces of great elegance and refinement. In this case, the eight reddish brown relief plaques circling the center of the octagonal vase were left unglazed and covered with wax and grease when the vase was fired. The reddish brown plaques set off the relief molded figures of the Eight Immortals from the cool, jade green celadon glaze. Other examples of this style indicate that the relief plaques might have once been gilded, but this appears not to have been the case with this example.



Figure 14.9 *The Lady of the Highest Primordial and the Empress of the Earth*, hanging scroll, ca. 1600. Paris: Musée Guimet. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

The Lady of the Highest Primordial and the Empress of the Earth, ca. 1600

Female deities, immortals, healers, and practitioners have always played prominent roles in religious Taoism.[33] The Taoist pantheon includes a number of high-ranking female deities, notably the Mother Empress (or Queen Mother) of the West, the Lady of the Highest Primordial, and the Empress of the Earth. The latter two are shown in this Ming dynasty hanging scroll (see Figure 14.9). Like the example discussed previously (*Divine Immortals of the Five Paths*), this painting on silk was created for use in an important Buddhist ritual that included recognition of these important Taoist deities.

The Lady of the Highest Primordial appears at the top of the scroll. She represents the heavens and is accompanied by three female attendants holding various symbolic items. They are all elegantly dressed in colorful and flowing courtly style robes and have elaborate hairstyles and headdresses. According to legends, this female deity appeared in a vision (along with the Queen Mother of the West—the highest female deity in the Taoist pantheon) to an early Han dynasty emperor. She was later believed to have served as the teacher for several early legendary Taoist scholars. She is also known as the Realized Mother of the Three Heavens and, as such, "serves as a divine matriarchal figure."[34] The fact that she is accompanied by three attendants may reflect the fact that

yang (active, heavenly) energy is associated with odd numbers in ancient Chinese systems of divination.

Yin (passive, earthly) energy is associated with even numbers, and the Empress of the Earth, depicted on the lower section of the scroll, is accompanied by four female attendants. The Empress of the Earth is a figure from ancient and pre-Taoist Chinese religion who was adopted into the Taoist pantheon. She often appears with the Queen Mother of the West or, as here, with the Lady of the Divine Primordial. The Empress of the Earth is "a divine manifestation of the earth . . . [and] has secondary connotations as a protector spirit of graves and the deceased."[35]

These personifications of heavenly and earthly realms, the pairing of *yin* and *yang,* and the sense of elegant balance and coordination seen here are exemplary of not only fundamental Taoist concepts but also the later growth and development of courtly styles associated with Taoism in late imperial China.

Jade Plaque of a Taoist Paradise, 17th Century

Carved objects of jade, for various uses, have been produced in China since the Neolithic period (ca. 6500 BCE). "Jade" is actually a generic term for several different types of stones (nephrite, jadeite, and other composite minerals). Jade appears in a variety of colors, especially various shades of green. This 17th-century example from the late Ming or early Qing era attests to the continued popularity of jade objects throughout the history of Chinese art (see Plate 28). Jade carvings such as this example were avidly collected and admired by imperial patrons, scholars, and connoisseurs. These prized objects, often exquisitely carved and highly polished, frequently served devotional or ritual purposes or functioned as decorative objects for adorning scholars' desks or collectors' cabinets.

This particular 17th-century example is replete with Taoist iconography and symbolism. The representation of landscape scenes, sacred mountains and caves, and paradisiacal locales are especially common in Taoist art. The creation of miniature mountains in jade was especially popular from the 12th century onward.[36] Often these micro-scenes include exquisite details of humans, animals, trees, caves, and architectural elements. The viewer who contemplates one of these miniature sculptural landscapes takes an extensive visual journey through the scene in the same fashion as viewers of much larger-scale painted landscapes.

Frequently, these miniature jade landscapes are inhabited by various deities, as is the case here. This plaque represents Xi Wangmu (or Hsi Wang Mu), the Queen Mother of the West. She is depicted wearing an elaborate crown and flowing robes and is seated in a landscape of trees and rocks. Perhaps this setting is meant to represent her abode in the sacred K'un-lun mountain ranges of western China. Wild and remote mountains figure prominently in Taoist art and literature, as realms of the gods and immortals.

The Queen Mother of the West, the most important Taoist goddess, has a long history in Chinese popular religion and appears to derive from pre-Taoist goddess worship.[37] Early descriptions characterize her as a rather wild figure with magical powers over the natural world. She features in a number of early Taoist texts and has continued to play a major role in religious Taoism through the centuries. Her image gradually transformed to take on courtly, imperial connotations and iconography.[38]

> She not only resides in the splendid palaces of Mount Kunlun, but is the ruler of immortals, the controller of fate, the giver of good fortune, and the bestower of celestial blessings. She manages the holy scriptures of the religion, assuring their exactness and providing suitable transmission to earth; she creates protective talismans; she gives instructions on internal cultivation; and to the very fortunate she appears in person and bestows upon them the peaches of immortality which will grant a better and faster access to the divine realms.[39]

In the example illustrated, the Queen Mother of the West is accompanied by a number of symbols that emphasize her power and importance. The pine tree under which she sits is a symbol of strength and immortality, as are the crane and tortoise, all traditional symbols of longevity. The tortoise (lower right) is emitting clouds of smoke from his mouth, and a small pagoda appears to float in these clouds. On the upper left side, a figure appears floating in a bank of clouds. Stories of the miraculous powers of the immortals, including their abilities to fly and bi-locate, abound in Taoist literature and frequently feature in art as well.

The material from which this piece is carved—jade—is also a traditional symbol of strength, perseverance, and longevity. Hence, the material used to create this piece combined with the symbols and images depicted render this an excellent example of important Taoist themes and concepts.

NOTES

1. Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 124.

2. Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3.

3. Livia Kohn, ed., *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 3.

4. "Still continuing the tradition, the sixty-fourth Celestial Master resides today in Taiwan. The school is a form of communal religion, with a heavy emphasis on morality, ritual, purifications, and exorcism." Kohn, 4. See also Robinet, 53–77.

5. "Shangqing practice was highly individual and aimed at transferring the practitioner into the realms of the immortals, first by visualizations, then by ecstatic journeys, and finally through the ingestion of a highly poisonous alchemical elixer." Kohn, 5. See also Robinet, 114–48.

6. “Much simpler than the practice of Highest Clarity, Numinous Treasure required merely the recitation of its scriptures and participation in its rites to guarantee a place among the perfected.” Kohn, 5. See also Robinet, 149–83.

7. The story of Lao Tzu’s visit to the “barbarian lands” (*Laozi huahu*) was especially popular during the later Han era (c. 300 CE). “In attempting to account for the many similarities between the doctrines of Buddhism and Taoism . . . the belief was conceived of that Laozi had traveled to India and had become Buddha and/or converted its inhabitants (barbarians) to his doctrines. Thus Buddhism was nothing but the doctrine preached by Laozi after his departure to points west.” Arthur Pontynen, “The Deification of Laozi in Chinese History and Art,” *Oriental Art* 26, no. 2 (1980): 193.

8. Kohn, 4.

9. Rolf A. Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries,” in *Facets of Taoism,* ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 53–81.

10. Stephen Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), 19.

11. Pontynen, 193.

12. Isabelle Robinet, “The Taoist Immortal: Jesters of Light and Shadow, Heaven and Earth,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13/14, no. 1 (1985–86): 87–105.

13. Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion,* 18.

14. Little, 16.

15. Ninji Ofuchi, “The Formation of the Taoist Canon,” in *Facets of Taoism,* ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 253–67.

16. Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, *Taoism: Origins, Beliefs, Practices, Holy Texts, Sacred Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38.

17. Little, 13.

18. Oldstone-Moore, 7.

19. Smith, 130.

20. Livia Kohn, “Transcending Personality: From Ordinary to Immortal Life, *Taoist Resources* 2, no. 2 (1990): 1–20; and Livia Kohn, “Eternal Life in Taoist Mysticism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110, no. 4 (1990): 622–40.

21. Robinet, *Taoism, Growth of a Religion,* 20.

22. Wu Hung, “Mapping Early Taoist Art: The Visual Culture of Wudoumi Dao,” in *Taoism and the Arts of China,* ed. Stephen Little, 77.

23. Oldstone-Moore, 8–9.

24. Nancy Steinhardt, “Taoist Architecture,” in *Taoism and the Arts of China,* ed. Stephen Little, 57.

25. Arthur Pontynen, “The Dual Nature of Laozi in Chinese History and Art,” *Oriental Art* 26, no. 3 (1980): 308–13.

26. “The reason is simple: as the personification of the Dao, Laozi was considered to have neither matter nor form; he could therefore only be symbolized. . . . not represented by a figurative likeness. This early Taoist convention persisted until at least the fifth century.” Hung, 87.

27. Yang Liu, “Origins of Daoist Iconography,” *Ars Orientalis* 31 (2001): 31–64.

28. The other major Taoist sect surviving today is the earliest one to have been founded: the school of the Celestial Masters. See Kohn, *Taoist Experience,* 7.

29. Yoshitoyo Yoshioka, "Taoist Monastic Life," in *Facets of Taoism,* ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 229–52.

30. On the symbolism of incense burning generally, see Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), especially chapter 5: "The Incense-Burner: Communication and Deference," 135–60.

31. Little, 227.

32. Little, 251.

33. See Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press, 2003); and Eva Wong, "Taoism," in *Her Voice, Her Faith: Women Speak on World Religions,* ed. Arvind Sharma (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 119–43.

34. Shawn Eichman, catalogue entry number 97 in *Taoism and the Arts of China,* ed. Stephen Little, 281.

35. Eichman, 281.

36. Rolf Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

37. See Despeux and Kohn, 25–47.

38. Suzanne Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

39. Despeux and Kohn, 29.

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—15—

Confucianism

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Confucianism is traditionally included in studies of the world's religions as a philosophy/belief system developed by the ancient Chinese scholar Confucius (Kongzi or Kong Fu Zi, the Venerable Master Kong, 551–479 BCE). His teachings primarily represent suggestions on ethical codes of conduct that he developed and advanced during the course of his career as a government official, political reformer, sage, and itinerant scholar. Confucianism has often been described as an ethics-based philosophy and a way of life, rather than a strict set of religious beliefs.[1] However, although Confucianism is largely philosophical in content, it cannot be fully understood without recognition of its religious context, dimensions, and function.

> Those interpretations that have sought to define Confucianism as a form of humanism devoid of religious character have failed to realize the central feature that persists throughout the tradition. . . . Confucianism is an ethical system and humanistic teaching. It is also, however, a tradition that bears a deep and profound sense of the religious, and any interpretation that ignores this quality has missed its quintessential feature.[2]

Confucianism has been of supreme influence and importance in shaping centuries of history and cultural traditions in China and numerous other Asian regions including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

It is often pointed out that the origins of Confucianism can be traced far back into ancient Chinese history, many centuries before the life and teaching of

Confucius himself. Confucius regarded himself less as an innovator and more as a transmitter and correct interpreter of ancient, inherited traditions and beliefs about society, government, politics, and the roles of rulers and individuals in maintaining earthly and cosmic order through proper adherence to their social responsibilities.

He was born in eastern China, in the city of Qufu in the state of Lu, during a highly troubled and turbulent period in Chinese history. This was during the last centuries of the Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1050–256 BCE), which preceded and overlapped with the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), during which the Zhou rulers ultimately lost their power and territorial control. By this time, "real power resided with the aristocratic rulers of various principalities, who constantly sought to strengthen their positions and enlarge their domains at the expense of their neighbors."[3] Confucius attributed this social and political deterioration to a loss of ancient values and traditions, "the behavioral norms, rituals, and etiquette laid down by the founders of the Zhou Dynasty to bring about civility, order, peace, and harmony in the community from the top of society on down."[4] A restoration of harmonious social order and effective government, according to Confucius, could be achieved by reforms of conduct based on ethical principles: "honor, respect, love, and service." He believed that "attention to rank, obligations, and ritual duties will lead ultimately to the perfection of oneself and the transformation of society."[5]

The ultimate foundations for many of Confucius's ideas are thus derived from his study of ancient Chinese texts, associated primarily with the early Zhou Dynasty. Now known as the Five Classics, these include the *Yi Jing* (*I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*), *Shi Jing* (*Book of Odes*), *Li Ji* (*Book of Rites*), *Shu Jing* (*Book of Documents*), and *Chun Qiu* (*Springs and Autumns*). These texts range from manuals of divination to accounts of historical events, to records of traditional poetry and rituals. They overall contain much information and guidance on ancient customs, morality, protocol, and propriety. These classic works represent the basis for Confucian thought and for its later developments.

Although some traditions credit Confucius with editing or even authoring sections of these classics, the teachings of Confucius are primarily found in the work known as *Lunyu* or *The Analects of Confucius*, which was compiled in several stages during the fourth century BCE, decades after his death. This work has been called the "most influential book ever written in East Asia,"[6] which has "probably exercised a greater influence on the history and culture of the Chinese people than any other work in the Chinese language."[7] The word *Lunyu* means "conversations," and the book largely takes the form of dialogue between Confucius (the Master teacher) and his students.

> The reader of the Analects should be prepared to encounter not a formal treatise but conversations that seek to illuminate or grapple with important concepts, sometimes in clear and succinct form, at other times in more oblique fashion,

> colored by the sort of surprise, misunderstanding, pleased reaction, displeased reaction, humor, or sarcasm that characterize conversations in real life.[8]

Although during his life, Confucius did not succeed in his efforts to convince contemporary political leaders of the importance of his advice, he gleaned a wide following of students and disciples who continued to promulgate his ideas after his death. Known as the *Ru* or *Rujia* school (scholars or moralists), later important figures include Mencius (or Mengzi, ca. 372–289 BCE) and Xun Zi (ca. 370–286 BCE), both of whom also strove for political reform based on Confucian ethical principles, but who also developed their own divergent ideas about human nature and social roles.

During the period of the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE), Confucian teachings were suppressed. However, in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), Confucianism reemerged to become the official state doctrine under the emperor Wu Di (reigned 140–87 BCE). A Confucian academy was established in 124 BCE in the Han capital of Chang-an. All aspiring government employees and officials were required to study the Classics and Confucianism and to pass a rigorous examination on this material. It was during this period, as well, that temples dedicated to Confucius began to be constructed, and ritual commemorations were held to honor his spirit.

> During the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) Confucian temples were extended by imperial decree to all major cities throughout the land. Local governors had to go and pay their respects to the Master at the temple before taking up their appointments. Ceremonies were conducted there annually, and the temples became especially connected with education and the examination system.[9]

At the same time, Buddhism (see chapter 13), which had reached China in the first century CE, and Taoism (see chapter 14), which had developed much earlier in China, became increasingly influential, although Confucianism continued to be the political philosophy of the imperial court and government. The Neo-Confucian revival of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) ushered in another significant era characterized by important degrees of dialogue between the three systems of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Important Neo-Confucian thinkers include Zhu Xi (1130–1200), whose reinterpretations and augmentations of Confucian teachings dominated educational and government practices in China through the early 20th century. Later Ming Dynasty syncretic thinkers such as Lin Chao-en (or Lin Zhaoen, 1517–98) sought to unify the three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.[10] Indeed, the relationships between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in Chinese culture and history are often so intertwined that it can be difficult to clearly separate their unique characteristics from the shared elements. In practice, elements of all three may be combined. Chinese community traditions, Chinese imperial traditions, and elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism often blend together. Even

so, it is possible to identify several distinctive beliefs and practices associated with Confucianism.

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

Religion and politics have been very closely entwined in China since very ancient times. The belief that earthly rulers are divinely mandated to carry out the will of heaven can be traced far back into Chinese history and mythology. The effective functioning of earthly society depends on the ruler's awareness of and adherence to heaven's will. In the ancient Shang Dynasty (ca. 1766–1050 BCE), a remote supreme being, *Shang Di* ("the Lord on High"), was worshiped. The practice of ancestral veneration is also attested at this early date. The spirits of royal ancestors were believed to be able to communicate their continued guidance to earthly rulers and were often consulted by the Shang aristocracy via divination practices. Many examples of ancient "oracle bones" give evidence of the divination practice known as pyroscapulimancy[11] (see Figure 15.1). Questions posed were answered via the diviner's interpretation of cracks and patterns created when heated rods were placed on the bones (especially shoulder blades) taken from sacrificial oxen or sheep. The bottom shells of turtles were also used; this practice is known as plastromancy. The answers recorded on these bones and shells are also evidence of the early development of Chinese ideographic writing.

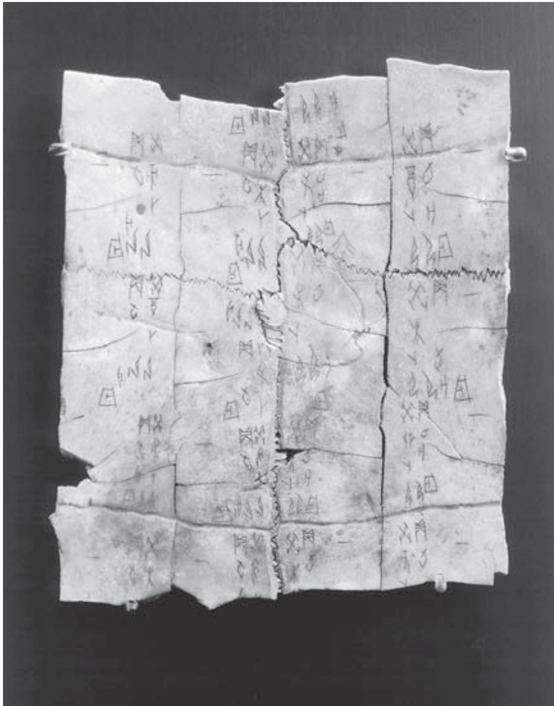


Figure 15.1 Tortoise shell with divinatory text, Shang Dynasty, 14th to 13th century BCE. The Art Archive / Musée Guimet Paris / Gianni Dagli Orti.

When the Shang Dynasty was overthrown by the Zhou Dynasty in the middle of the 11th century BCE, "the Zhou proclaimed that they had received the 'Mandate of Heaven,' the divinely sanctioned right to rule, because of their virtue in contrast to the depravity of the last Shang rulers. The idea that virtue and beneficent rule are the basis of the state was firmly established by this date."[12] The belief that *Tian* (or "Heaven") was the source of cosmic and earthly order replaced the worship of Shang Di. Tian was seen as "a non-anthropomorphic force that was able to control and influence events."[13]

A sense of connectedness between earthly and heavenly realms, the supreme significance of virtuous behavior, and a belief in the importance of venerating ancestors, all provide the background for

the teachings of Confucius and for the later development of Confucianism. Confucian thought is fundamentally based on the premise of an orderly universe guided by moral principles. Heavenly and earthly order is not characterized by capricious, whimsical, or self-serving behavior, but rather by a virtuous adherence to ethical principles. Foremost among these is the quality of *ren* (goodness, benevolence, human-heartedness), which requires that all people be treated with respect. "*Ren* has been described as the sum total of virtues, because Confucius once said that endurance, fortitude, simplicity and reticence are all close to the meaning of *ren*. When one of his disciples asked him how to practice *ren*, he replied, 'Love people.' "[14] The virtue of *ren* is directly manifested in righteous behavior (*yi*), the ability to make morally correct and proper decisions in one's actions and relationships with others, especially with "regard to the Five Relationships upon which society was believed to be based: those between sovereign and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friend and friend."[15] *Xiao* (filial piety) is thus an essential virtue for Confucianism. The respect and honor that dutiful children demonstrate to their parents is ideally mirrored in all social relationships within the Confucian hierarchy. "An ordered, harmonious society depends on each person playing his or her part appropriately and with good intent."[16]

Confucian ethics are thus fundamentally focused on the concerns of humans in society rather than in supernatural or other-worldly realms. The pursuit of *ren* via study, contemplation, and moral cultivation is the ultimate goal. The achievement of *ren* in society and human relationships will reflect the orderliness of the cosmic will (*li*). *Li* "was held to be immanent in all phenomena, including human relationships, and it was held to be manifested in the laws of the empire."[17] Confucius and his later followers emphasized the qualities of superior moral behavior demonstrated by "gentlemanly" modes of self-cultivation, including "intensive scholarship, a reverent attitude and disciplined mind, and 'quiet sitting'—meditation for purifying and focusing the mind which can produce a profoundly transformative experience."[18] The ideal Confucian gentleman-scholar was most often a member of the *literati* class of elite, well-educated government officials and administrators who oversaw imperial functions and the rituals performed under imperial directives.

The maintenance of ancient rituals was of critical importance for Confucius and his followers, who visualized the earthly imperial bureaucracy as a reflection of the heavenly realm. On earth, the emperor resided at the apex of the social hierarchy, just as heaven was visualized as the dwelling place of the gods, presided over by the heavenly counterpart of the emperor on earth. This celestial realm also included numerous deities and ancestral spirits who served to guide and influence earthly matters.

> The imperial pantheon was a meticulously regulated hierarchical nexus of cults that extended from the temples and altars in the capital to the county level though the empire. Imperial cults were bureaucratically distinct from those of

> Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religion in that they were served by officers of the court and bureaucracy and sanctioned by the Confucian canon.[19]

Ancestral veneration is long attested in China, "but as a matter for the court, not for the general public. Confucius popularized the practice, teaching that it could strengthen family ties and play an important role in ensuring the continuity of the family."[20] The veneration of ancestors, the performance of imperial rituals (including animal sacrifice), the belief in a celestial pantheon of deities, and the veneration of local tutelary gods all have roots in ancient Chinese traditions and were embraced and promulgated by Confucius and his followers. Although it certainly can be said that Confucianism devotes greatest attention to understanding and cultivating human behavior on earth, the development of the veneration of Confucius and the centrality of this cult in Chinese imperial and ritual traditions cannot be underestimated.[21]

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

Confucianism has had such a profound influence on Asian culture and art that it is extremely challenging to attempt to define or separate "Confucian art" from the larger historical and stylistic contexts. Narrowly defined, Confucian art would include examples of statuary depicting Confucius and later Confucian scholars, paintings and illustrations of events in the life of Confucius and his followers, illustrations of Confucian teachings, and the many examples of Confucian temples found throughout Asia. At the same time, however, Confucian themes and values are also demonstrated in art and architectural forms not specifically or necessarily designed for strictly Confucian purposes. The Confucian values of order, harmonious relationships, and scholarly contemplation can be sensed in architectural planning of both public and private spaces, in the venerable traditions of Chinese landscape painting, and in the contemplative appreciation of nature as also demonstrated in garden design.

Temples

The first temple to Confucius was dedicated soon after his death (see Figure 15.2). Located in Confucius's birthplace, Qufu (Shangdong province), it originally consisted simply of the three-room house where Confucius had lived. In 478 BCE, the ruler of Lu declared this structure to be a sacred site dedicated to the memory of Confucius. In subsequent years, many scholars settled in the town, and many visitors came to pay their respects to Confucius at the temple and his nearby grave site. Over the centuries, the Confucius Temple at Qufu expanded greatly to cover an area of close to 25 acres, with multiple buildings arranged in axial fashion around a series of nine courtyards. Numerous renovations, repairs, and expansions transformed the site into an



Figure 15.2 Temple of Confucius, Qufu, China. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

impressive and richly decorated architectural complex dating primarily to the 17th- and 18th-century Qing Dynasty period.[22]

The enlargement of the architectural complex reflects the growth and expansion of Confucianism under imperial patronage as well as the worship and veneration of Confucius himself. Emperor Gao (reigned 206–195 BCE), founder of the Han Dynasty, established the custom of offering sacrifices at the temple in 195 BCE, a practice that continued through subsequent centuries.[23] The close association of Confucianism and imperial rituals and traditions is also reflected by the layout of the temple complex that, in its axial balance, symmetry, and scale, mirrors the design of the Imperial Palace complex in Beijing.

> Confucian temple architecture echoes the architecture of the emperor's palace—notably the north–south axis on which the important halls are located. The temples are built on a square base, and internally they are symmetrical, with each hall a mirror-image of the one opposite, conveying the order associated with Confucian thought. Temples were public spaces—results of civil service examinations were posted in them and they were also used for training in music and ritual.[24]

In 630 CE, during the Tang Dynasty, an imperial decree was issued requiring that Confucian temples be constructed in all schools across the empire. This,

too, reflected the increasing importance of Confucianism as an integral aspect of government administration and educational programs. During the Tang and Song dynasties, the state sacrifices and rituals associated with the veneration of Confucius and his followers became increasingly complicated and officially regulated, a process that continued through the Ming and Qing periods. The growth of the cult of Confucius can also be traced via the many prestigious titles he was granted, such as Great Completer, Ultimate Sage, Exalted First Teacher, and the Sage of Culture.[25]

> As the domain of the cosmos over which Confucius presided, culture (*wen*) encompassed the imperium and its orderly operations based on the teachings of the ancient sage-kings as recorded in the Confucian canon. This culture was also embodied in the Confucian literati devoted to the primacy of ritual and music, which gave perfect expression to human sentiments and generated the orderly principles (*wen*) that governed the human world.[26]

Confucian temples, regardless of date, reflect the traditional and often conservative styles of Chinese architecture based on interlocking modules of wooden construction.[27] Often elevated on low platforms, temples show the basic post-and-lintel forms typical of Chinese architecture, often with elaborate bracketing systems and impressive roof lines. The upward sloping eaves of the much-restored Confucius Temple in Taipei, Taiwan, are characteristic of southern Chinese forms of the Qing Dynasty (see Figure 15.3). Tile roofs of imperial yellow, carved columns decorated with traditional Chinese symbols such as protective dragons, and painted and carved friezes of similar motifs abound.



Figure 15.3 Temple of Confucius, Taipei, Taiwan. SEF / Art Resource, NY.

The interiors of Confucian temples are often richly decorated as well, though often in a slightly less flamboyant style than Taoist or Buddhist temples (see Figure 15.4). Altars to Confucius and major Confucian thinkers were commonly enriched with sculptures of these figures until the early



Figure 15.4 Temple of Confucius, Jiading, China. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.

16th century, when, by imperial decree, many of these carved likenesses were replaced by memorial "spirit tablets" simply bearing their names. Statues of Confucius are still found in many temples, however. Because Confucian temples were often associated with schools or academies, the names of those successful in passing the rigorous exams required for entry into government service were frequently displayed on stone tablets within the temple/academy precinct, such as the stone steles found in the garden of the Temple of Confucius in Beijing (see Figure 15.5).

Images of Confucius and Confucian Themes in Art

Records indicate that commemorative portraits of Confucius and his disciples (either in painting or in sculpture) were produced at an early date and certainly during the Han Dynasty, when Confucianism became the state cult, and the practice of imperial offerings to his spirit became established. Although no early examples exist, engraved stone steles of the Tang Dynasty (seventh century CE) probably suggest the appearance of earlier examples (see Figure 15.6). Confucius is often depicted in a dignified frontal pose, with his hands clasped in front of him. He is represented as a scholar-official with appropriate regalia and demeanor. "The formality of the pose, the generic physical appearance, and the absence of specific context or activity invest [these images] with the timeless quality of an icon."[28] The conventions of commemorative portraiture



Figure 15.5 Temple of Confucius, Beijing, China; scholar's tablets. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 15.6 Portrait of Confucius, carved stone stele, Tang Dynasty (618–906 CE). Werner Forman / Art Resource.

> were established in the Han Dynasty. In addition to being made for use in funerary rites and memorial ceremonies, commemorative portraits also served didactic functions by perpetuating role models in visible (albeit idealized) form. Model figures were portrayed not with idiosyncratic physical features, but with the characteristics appropriate to their categorical "type," as expressed through posture, bodily proportions, clothing, and objects held. The background is typically blank, rather than delineating a particular setting.[29]

Images of Confucius and his disciples were widely produced in the subsequent centuries and featured (in both painted and sculptural form) in the numerous temples and academies established throughout the empire.[30] Within temples, these images provided a focus for commemorative ceremonies and rituals; "however, the proliferation of temples containing iconic images of Confucius and his numerous disciples, and the religious character of the sacrifices themselves, also prompted his cult to develop certain characteristics of devotional religion, like Buddhism

and Daoism."[31] This became a matter of concern especially during the Ming period (1368–1644), when, in spite of some opposition, iconic images were removed from Confucian temples and replaced with inscribed tablets bearing only the names of important figures.

Concomitantly, during the Ming period, illustrated narratives of the life of Confucius began to appear in increasing numbers in various media including woodblock prints, paintings on silk, and incised stone tablets.[32] Some scholars believe that this upsurge in Confucian pictorial narrative imagery in the Ming period reflects the removal of images from the Confucian temples. The illustrated narratives addressed "an enduring desire for representational embodiment"[33] on the part of scholars as well as members of the literate public. Many woodblock printed pictorial biographies of Confucius were produced by an increasing number of commercial publishers in the Ming period. These editions were more accessible to a less-than-exclusive or elite audience. The ultimate sources for many of these narrative illustrations have been traced to previous traditions of Buddhist illustrated biography, and "in a sense, the pictures of Confucius' life offered a means for his cult to continue to compete with Buddhism and various deity cults."[34] The production of illustrated scenes from the lives of Confucius and his disciples continued well into the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) (see Figure 15.7).

Illustrations of Confucian texts and Confucian themes also appear widely in Asian art of various dates and media, including illustrated scrolls, woodcuts, silk paintings, and painted screens. The utmost Confucian virtue of *xiao* (filial piety) was expounded by many writers and was often shown in sequential narrative illustrations focusing on the proper and decorous behavior of dutiful



Figure 15.7 Scenes from the Life of Confucius, Qing Dynasty, early 19th century. Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.

persons. Scenes include children paying respect to their parents, subjects paying homage to rulers, and so on.

The influence of Confucian teachings outside China is well attested also by the revived popularity of Confucian themes in 16th- and 17th-century Japan. Members of Japan's ruling elite class (the Tokugawa shoguns), eager to increase their political influence and legitimacy, paid homage to Confucian virtues and commissioned works of art illustrating themes such as filial piety. *The Twenty-Four Paragons of Filial Piety,* depicted in two large six-panel folding screens attributed to the circle of Kano Mitsunobu (1565–1608), is an excellent example of the themes of self-sacrifice and humility (as well as the rewards for this behavior) in a series of both celestial and earthly exemplars (see Figure 15.8).

In addition to portraits of Confucius and his followers, narrative scenes from their lives, and illustrations of Confucian teachings, Confucianism has also had a profound influence on the arts of poetry, calligraphy, landscape painting, and garden design. This pervasive influence can be widely noted, perhaps most especially in the refined works associated with the *literati,* particularly those of the Ming Dynasty "Southern" and "Wu" Schools. The Confucian virtues of scholarship, self-cultivation, contemplation, and the development of skills with artistic pursuits were avidly demonstrated by gentleman-scholars, especially retired members of the government, who settled in the region of the city of Suzhou during the Ming period. The achievement of skill with the refined arts of calligraphy, poetry, music, and painting—long considered hallmarks of the cultivated gentlemanly character—flourished among many groups of scholar-amateurs centered in the Suzhou region during the 15th through 17th centuries. During this period especially, the venerable materials used for both calligraphy and painting (ink, inkstone, brush, and paper) were termed "the four treasures of the scholar's studio" (*wen fang si bao*).[35]



Figure 15.8 Circle of Kano Mitsunobu (1565–1608), *The Twenty-Four Paragons of Filial Piety,* painted screen, early 17th century. New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery / Art Resource, NY.

Landscape painting has an extremely lengthy history in China. Evocative scenes of the beauty and power of nature have long been produced by Chinese artists. Indeed, landscape painting has been called "one of the greatest achievements of Chinese culture."[36] Many of the foundations for Chinese landscape painting traditions were established in the 10th century by several artists who specialized in creating expansive views (in either horizontal or vertical scroll format) of mountains, streams, trees, rocks, clouds, fog, and winding pathways. These often include architectural elements and small figures of people journeying through or admiring the extensive landscape. It might be said that, from its origins, Chinese landscape painting demonstrates far less interest in topographic or documentary recording of scenes and landscape elements, but is far more concerned with evoking moods and essences rather than simply outward appearances. In this sense, Chinese landscape painting generally has a highly spiritual/mystical dimension, which undercurrent permeates the various traditions and stylistic developments. "What was sought after was the essence of a scene and the metaphors it might offer for life, rather than a superficial attractive resemblance."[37] Purely realistic representations, it was felt, do not really reflect the depth and complexity of actual human experiences, perceptions, and understanding.

> At moments of extraordinary clarity, when the mind is receptive but at rest, uncluttered by distracting considerations . . . one's perceptions become a part of one's self, in an undifferentiated "passage of felt life." The cumulative absorption and ordering of such perceptions is the "self-cultivation" of the Confucian system, this in turn is the proper stuff of art.[38]



Figure 15.9 Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), *The Hour That Mist Descends into the Shadows*, scroll painting. Paris: Musée Guimet. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

Artists of the Wu School (not a formal institution but rather a group related by shared interests) sought especially to create works of landscape painting that evoked poetic and personal concepts, finding "comfort and reassurance in the belief that they were the elite, upholding the Confucian virtues."[39] The scholar-painter Wen Zhengming (Wen Cheng-ming, 1470–1559) exemplifies this trend. He excelled in the arts of calligraphy, poetry, and painting, and many of his works, such as *The Hour That Mist Descends into the Shadows* (Figure 15.9), represent far more than simply literal rendering of landscape scenes. This vertical scroll painting done in ink on silk focuses attention on two tall and ancient pine trees surrounded by rocks and mountains with a small bridge visible in the distance. This scene shows the end of day, the descent of mist into the twilight, and thus poetically evokes themes of the passage of time, mortality, loss, and old age as well as the fleeting and enduring beauties of nature.

> Paintings of old trees, especially the pine and cypress, are conspicuous among Wen Cheng-ming's late works. Like waterfalls and rocks, they belonged to an austere, uncompromising environment, free of blandishments; that was the way Wen sometimes chose to see his world, as one in which survival required tireless effort, and in which life made a place for itself through steadfastness and integrity. . . . for Wen Cheng-ming, commitment to the austere was a matter of moral principle, not of physical circumstance.[40]

Wen Zhengming also served as a consultant in the design of one of the most renowned Ming Dynasty "Scholar's Gardens": the Garden of the Humble Administrator (or *Zhuozheng Yuan*), located in Suzhou (see Figure 15.10). The property was purchased in the early 16th century by a retired government administrator, Wang Xianchen, who created a large villa with extensive gardens to serve as an idyllic retreat for himself, family members, and honored guests. Although the gardens and buildings have been much altered, modified, and renovated since their original creation, the design retains much of the essence and purpose of its original conception as an enclosed private retreat for a scholarly gentleman trained in Confucian virtues, well educated in the classics, and with a refined aesthetic sensibility befitting his station. Numerous pavilions, towers, halls, bridges, covered walkways, and paths take the visitor through a series of precisely planned viewing experiences in the extensive landscape. Rocks, trees, and water are the typical buildings blocks of classical Chinese garden design, here brilliantly exploited to greatest potential in providing a sense of calm, repose, reflection, and inspiration for artistic pursuits.



Figure 15.10 The Garden of the Humble Administrator, Suzhou, China. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.

> In early spring, plum flowers at the Fragrant Snow and Clouds Pavilion blossom against the cold, and crabapple flowers at the Spring Crabapple Flower Dock weave a brocade of colors; in summer time at Jiashi Pavilion the loquat trees are laden with golden fruit; in autumn the fragrance of the rice flowers wafts to inside the Fragrant Sorghum Wind House; and in winter time pines and bamboos at the Pine Wind and Water Pavilion keep their green in the cold. The Tower of Viewing feasts the eye, the Distant Fragrance Hall invigorates one's sense of smell, and the Rain Listening Hall pleases the ears with the sound of raindrops falling on banana leaves.[41]

EXAMPLES

The Imperial City and Temple of Heaven, Beijing

Confucian teachings emphasize adherence to traditions, the maintenance of hierarchical relations, and respect for authority. The achievement of earthly harmony in the social and political realms serves as a reflection of cosmic ordering principles.

> Confucius firmly believed that harmony within the court would result in a prosperous and powerful reign. Harmony within the family and with nature would bring good fortune and health to the household. Inner harmony and moderation of one's self could bring a well-balanced character, and it is the aim of self-cultivation. Attuning to Heaven came from harmony with nature, obedience to elders brought harmony to the family, therefore, it could be said that the most important of Confucius's teachings, which also influenced architecture, was harmony.[42]

The creation of "imposing buildings expressing a dignity inherent in the concept of the state,"[43] or what could be described as "the architecture of hierarchy,"[44] is, without doubt, no better demonstrated than in the extensive and resplendent Imperial City of Beijing with its numerous axially arranged structures and deeply symbolic program. It is impossible to overstate the vast scale of this architectural complex, "the largest and best-preserved palace complex in the world."[45] Created on the site of earlier Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) structures, the Imperial City was largely created in the Ming period (1368–1644) and enlarged in the Qing (1644–1911) periods. It served as the center of Chinese government administration and as imperial residence for close to five centuries.

From very ancient times, Chinese emperors were believed to derive their power and authority through heavenly mandate. The emperors, as the Sons of Heaven, were required to offer sacrifices and prayers to heaven and earth to ensure the continued prosperity of the empire. "A principal duty of the Chinese court was to provide ritual feasts for the gods and spirits at imperial altars and temples. From ancient times to the early twentieth century, the emperor regularly offered a ritual feast or sacrifice (*ji*) to Heaven and Earth, the royal ancestors, the gods of grains and soils, sun and moon, stars, and other gods and spirits that reigned over different realms of the cosmos."[46]



Figure 15.11 The Temple of Heaven: Hall of Prayers for a Good Harvest, Beijing, China, early 15th century. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.

The Temple of Heaven complex, located in the outer city area of Beijing, just to the south of the Imperial and Forbidden city enclosures, was constructed to serve these traditional purposes in the early 15th century (ca. 1406–21.) The *Qinian Dian* (or Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests) is one of three major structures in the complex (see Figure 15.11). It is an imposing circular wooden building elevated on a series of three concentric stone platforms that are numerically mirrored in the triple-gabled roof of blue tiles, symbolizing the heavens. Numeric and astronomical symbolism are apparent in the repetition of sets of 12 pillars (signifying the 12 months of the year and hours of the day) and the sets of four columns (representing the seasons of the year). The interior of the building is richly decorated with painted geometric designs, cloud patterns, and imperial dragon emblems. At the apex of the ceiling is a carved and gilded design of a dragon and a phoenix. "In ancient times, the tablets of deceased emperors were placed on a table under the coffered ceiling. Approaching from the long, raised terrace, one crossed the high threshold of the great hall, gradually approaching the centre under the elaborate 60-foot high ceiling. The designer of this temple may have intended the emperor to experience an integration between himself, the heaven above and his ancestors."[47]

The extensive complex of the Imperial City, the core of which contains the Forbidden City, is altogether an absolutely stunning expression of hierarchical authority.

> From the very beginning, it was designed to be a place of display and spectacle . . . . a terrestrial refraction of the realm of the celestial Jade Emperor, or Heavenly Ancestor, and his court which was said to rule over the universe. . . . It was conceived on such a monumental scale so as to awe not only the subjects of China, but also the tributary peoples who lived along the extensive borders of Ming territory. It was also the focal point of imperial rituals and festivals designed to ensure the harmony of heaven, earth, and man.[48]

It consists of a series of imposing gates giving access to a vast and axially laid out, walled, and moated complex of ceremonial and residential structures that progress from south to north along the central axis. The northern area (off limits to all but imperial family and household) contains the imperial residences, includ-

ing a series of palaces with thousands of rooms placed around courtyards in labyrinthine complexity. The southern gate (*Tian'anmen*—Gate of Heavenly Peace) gives access into a large courtyard, beyond which the *Tuan Men* gate (Gate of Uprightness) opens into another vast courtyard before the *Wu Men* (Meridian) gate—the entrance into the Forbidden City. The Meridian gate actually comprises five separate entrances or gates, each of which had specific uses.

> The central gateway was reserved for the emperor, although the empress was allowed to pass through it once on her wedding day, and the three top examination candidates passed through it after they had accepted honors in the palace. Royal princes, civil and military officials used the gates on the two sides, while the outer gateways were opened only on the days when the emperor held court. On those days, civil ministers would enter through the east gate and military officials came through the west gate. Candidates for the palace examination filed out according to their examination number: those with odd numbers by way of the gate on the left and those with even numbers through the right.[49]

Inside the Meridian gate, five bridges (with use restricted as just noted) cross over a curved stream (Golden River) to the elevated *T'ai-ho Men* (Gate of Supreme Harmony), beyond which is located the first and most impressive in a series of imposing halls: the *T'ai-ho Tien* (Hall of Supreme Harmony) (see Plate 29). This large and richly decorated rectangular wooden structure, elevated on three marble platforms, served as the imperial audience hall where the emperors held court. The distance from the outer city gate (*Yung Ting Men*)—near which the Temple of Heaven is located—to the imperial audience hall is approximately three miles.

> This whole axial approach was consciously designed to provide a suitably impressive setting for emperors who considered themselves the mightiest rulers on earth. At no point can one see the entire route or final destination. The axis unfolds instead as a staged series of spaces, progressing logically from one to the next, and it is the cumulative experience of the sequence that gives it measured dignity and power. It may also be interpreted as a supreme expression of Confucian teachings regarding hierarchy and deference to authority.[50]

Beyond the Hall of Supreme Harmony are the axially located Hall of Complete Harmony and Hall of Preserving Harmony (used for preparation and rehearsing of ceremonies). The Gate of Heavenly Purity leads to the inner court area of the imperial residences: the Palace of Heavenly Purity (occupied by the emperor), the Palace of Earthly Tranquility (occupied by the empress), and the Hall of Union. The Hall of Mental Cultivation, numerous other courtyards and structures to the east and west (occupied by the emperor's concubines and children), and the imperial gardens are also found within the northern area of this vast complex. The *Shen Wu* gate (Gate of Divine Might or Spiritual Prowess) marks the northern end of the Forbidden City.

Although the specific functions of the various structures within the complex varied slightly through the centuries, and shrines for Taoist as well as Buddhist

worship are found within the complex as well, the overall ambiance of authoritative organization, strict attention to protocol, and hierarchical order can be well seen as reflections of Confucian values founded in ancient Chinese rituals and traditions (see Plate 30).

NOTES

1. "The absence of the word 'religion' in the Chinese language before the nineteenth century . . . should alert us to the complex ways that the activities Western scholars tend to group together under the rubric of religion are themselves distributed and dispersed throughout some societies in uneven and unpredictable ways. In the ancient Chinese typology of ritual, 'religion'—specifically the liturgical form of religious practice on the auspicious rites—was subsumed under a broader category of 'ritual.'" Thomas Wilson, "Sacrifice and the Imperial Cult of Confucius," *History of Religions* 41, no. 3 (2002), 254–55.

2. Rodney Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 1–2.

3. John Chinnery, "Confucianism," in *Eastern Wisdom: An Illustrated Guide to the Religions and Philosophies of the East,* ed. C. Scott Littleton (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 92.

4. Barry Steben, "Confucius," in *Holy People of the World: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia,* ed. Phyllis Jestice, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 200.

5. Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, "Confucianism," in *Eastern Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto,* ed. Michael Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 324–25.

6. Chinnery, 94.

7. Burton Watson, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1.

8. Watson, 7.

9. Chinnery, 111.

10. Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

11. Léon Vandermeersh, "From Pyroscapulimancy to Writing," in *A History of Writing: From Hieroglyph to Multimedia,* ed. Anne-Marie Christin (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 90–91.

12. Oldstone-Moore, "Confucianism," in *Eastern Religions,* ed. Coogan, 323.

13. Oldstone-Moore, "Confucianism," in *Eastern Religions,* ed. Coogan, 323.

14. Chinnery, 102.

15. Chinnery, 102–3.

16. Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, "Chinese Traditions," in *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions,* ed. Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 217.

17. Romeyn Taylor, "Official Altars, Temples, and Shrines Mandated for All Counties in Ming and Qing," *T'oung Pao* 83, no. 1–3 (1997): 94.

18. Oldstone-Moore, "Confucianism," in *Eastern Religions,* ed. Coogan, 336–37.

19. Wilson, "Sacrifice and the Imperial Cult of Confucius," 253.

20. Chinnery, 107.

21. Thomas Wilson, ed., *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Society, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

22. Wang Liang, "The Confucius Temple Tragedy of the Cultural Revolution," in *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Society, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius*, ed. Thomas Wilson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 376–98.

23. Official documents record that this was "a 'large beast' (*tailao*) sacrifice of an ox, goat, and pig . . . The earliest record of this sacrifice, written a century later, provides no other details of the ceremony, and it gives no indication that any ancient precedent for the rite was explicitly invoked by the emperor, or the court historian who recorded the event." Wilson, "Sacrifice and the Imperial Cult of Confucius," 259.

24. Oldstone-Moore, "Confucianism," in *Eastern Religions*, ed. Coogan, 374.

25. Thomas Wilson, "The Ritual Formation of Confucian Orthodoxy and the Descendants of the Sage," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (1996): 559–84.

26. Wilson, "Sacrifice and the Imperial Cult of Confucius," 252. See also Leon Stover, *Imperial China and the State Cult of Confucius* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005).

27. See the excellent discussion and helpful diagrams in Laurence Liu, *Chinese Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 27–33.

28. Julia Murray, "Illustrations of the Life of Confucius: Their Evolution, Functions, and Significance in Late Ming China," *Artibus Asiae* 57, no. 1–2 (1997): 75.

29. Murray, "Illustrations," 75.

30. Julia Murray, "The Hangzhou Portraits of Confucius and Seventy-Two Disciples (*Shengxian tu*): Art in the Service of Politics," *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (1992): 7–18.

31. Murray, "Illustrations," 74.

32. Julia Murray, "The Temple of Confucius and Pictorial Biographies of the Sage," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 2 (1996): 269–300; and Julia Murray, "Varied Views of the Sage: Illustrated Narratives of the Life of Confucius," in *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Society, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius*, ed. Thomas Wilson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 222–64.

33. Murray, "Illustrations," 80.

34. Murray, "Illustrations," 80.

35. See Anne Farrer, *"The Brush Dances and the Ink Sings": Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy from the British Museum* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1990); and Chu-Tsing Li and James Watt, *The Chinese Scholar's Studio, Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987).

36. Lothar Ledderose, "The Earthly Paradise: Religious Elements in Chinese Landscape Art," in *Theories of the Arts in China,* ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 165.

37. Anne Farrer, "Calligraphy and Painting for Official Life," in *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art,* ed. Jessica Rawson (London: The British Museum Press, 1992), 115.

38. James Cahill, *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368–1580* (New York: Weatherhill, 1978), 91.

39. Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 229.

40. Cahill, 238–39.

41. Lou Qingxi, *Chinese Gardens* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2003), 38.

42. Liu, 19.

43. Liu, 20.

44. Geremie Barmé, *The Forbidden City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 25.

45. Lou Qingxi, *The Architectural Art of Ancient China* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2001), 21.

46. Wilson, "Sacrifice and the Imperial Cult of Confucius," 251.

47. Liu, 39.

48. Barmé, xi.

49. Yu Zhuoyun, *Palaces of the Forbidden City* (New York: Viking, 1984), 39.

50. Marian Moffett, Michael Fazio, and Lawrence Wodehouse, *A World History of Architecture* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), 96.

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—16—

Shinto

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Shinto has often been described as one of the world's oldest religious systems that is still practiced today. On the other hand, Shinto has also been described as an invention of the modern period. Both descriptions of Shinto are true, to some extent. The term *Shinto* derives from the translation, into Japanese, of the Chinese words *shen* (spirit) and *dao* (way). Shinto thus means the "way of the spirits" (or gods, or *kami*). Shinto is the native religion of Japan and still today, to a large extent, influences significant aspects of Japanese culture.

The roots of Shinto can be traced to the prehistoric period in Japan. Although the belief systems and religious practices of the very ancient Jomon period (12,500–300 BCE) are far from clearly understood, many scholars believe that the origins of Shinto practices of ancestral and spirit veneration are evidenced in the Jomon period. Certainly, by the later prehistoric period and specifically in the Yayoi culture (ca. 300 BCE–300 CE), archaeological finds reveal artifacts that seem to clearly indicate the development of beliefs and practices characteristic of later Shintoism. These artifacts (ritual objects and grave goods) include miniature grain storehouses, vessels for food and offerings, curved jewels (*magatama*), sacred spears and swords (*katana*), and ceremonial mirrors (*kagami*). Many of these objects figure prominently in later Shinto art and are associated with specific values; honesty is symbolized by the mirror, compassion is symbolized by the jewels, and wisdom is associated with the sword (see Figures 16.1 and 16.2).



Figure 16.1 Ritual spear blade, Yayoi period, Japan, ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE. London: British Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Through subsequent eras of Japanese history, Shinto beliefs became increasingly more defined, especially with the introduction of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, belief systems that reached Japan (through China and Korea) in the middle of the sixth century CE. Previous to this, it is doubtful that the religion was understood as anything other than the ancient, local, traditional beliefs that varied somewhat from region to region. Patron deities and the venerable ancestors of individual clans were worshiped; there were no written texts that described specific tenets or practices. "The concept of Shinto itself, in many respects, came about as a result of the entry of Buddhism into Japan."[1]

Buddhism was declared the official religion of the Japanese imperial court between the late sixth and early seventh century, and Shinto continued to exist in harmony with Buddhism, often with no sense of great distinction between the two. "Buddhists did not attempt to undermine or supplant Shinto, but simply founded their temples next to Shinto shrines and proclaimed that there was no fundamental conflict between the two faiths."[2] Indeed, as both Buddhism and Shintoism continued to develop in Japan during the medieval period, mutual influences and modifications resulted in what is known as *Ryobu* or "Double Shinto"—a sharing of deities and practices understood to have similar or supporting roles and meanings. "*Ryobu* Shinto became a form . . . that could be performed . . . without much concern about whether the practice was 'Shinto" or 'Buddhist.'"[3] Under the influence of Buddhism, Shinto adopted many Buddhist deities; conversely, many Shinto deities were subsumed into Buddhism and significantly influenced the development of Buddhism in Japan. Shinto and Buddhist art and architectural forms also mutually influenced each other.

Although Buddhism was the dominant belief system in Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867), the renewed interest in ancient Japanese texts during the 18th century by a number of Japanese scholars ultimately contributed to the greater understanding of Shinto as the native or indigenous religion of Japan. The Native Studies or National Learning Movement was especially led by the scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730–1800) whose studies and interpretations of ancient historical and mythological texts were instrumental in defining Shinto as the true religion of Japan. His writings, as well as those by Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), ultimately intermingled dramatically with politics in the later 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. "A nostalgic, romanticized view of the past developed around the idea that there was something especially special and distinctive about being Japanese—and this essence was intricately intertwined with Shinto."[4]



Figure 16.2 Bronze mirror, middle Kofun period, Japan, fourth century CE. The Art Archive / Musée Guimet Paris / Gianni Dagli Orti.

Thus, following the formal restoration of imperial power under Emperor Meiji in 1868, Shintoism, with its emphasis on the divine lineage of Japanese rulers, became seen as the official religion of Japan. State Shinto or Shrine Shinto, with definitively nationalistic and political connotations, existed in Japan up until the end of World War II. Buddhism and Shinto were formally separated during the Meiji period. "Shinto precincts within former Buddhist complexes had to be walled off into separate compounds containing no images or structures related to Buddhism; only Shinto priests could head a shrine; government support of Buddhist temples ended."[5] The policy of *shimbutsu bunri*—the dissociation of Shinto and Buddhist deities—had very dramatic consequences on the history of Japan and on the arts. Much Buddhist art in Japan was destroyed; monasteries and temples were closed down; statues, paintings, ritual implements, and documents were obliterated; and "the government pretended to return to the 'real' source of Japanese identity and religious consciousness."[6]

Although the Meiji Constitution of 1889 ostensibly granted religious freedom in Japan, practitioners of all faiths and sects needed to recognize Shrine Shinto. According to government directives, Shrine Shinto was not considered or construed to be a religion, but rather a civic responsibility, and hence could be supported, funded, and promulgated by the government.

> Nowhere else in modern history do we find so pronounced an example of state sponsorship of a religion—in some respects the state can be said to have created Shinto as its official "tradition," but in the process Shinto was irrevocably changed . . . [and] in the end, Shinto, as adopted by the modern Japanese state, was largely an invented tradition.[7]

In 1945, at the end of World War II, the Japanese emperor renounced his claims to divinity, and the 1947 Constitution of Japan prohibited the new Japanese government from being formally involved with religion. In modern-day Japan, however, Shinto "continues to thrive and to command the affection, if not absolute loyalty, of the majority of the Japanese people. Indeed, in a great many respects, to be Japanese is to be Shinto, no matter what other religions one espouses."[8]

Although the roots of Shintoism can be traced back to prehistoric times in Japan, it is important to note that Shinto claims no single founder, enlightened being, or prophet whose personal experiences with the divine inspired the belief system. Shinto is not understood to be a revealed religion in the same sense that, for example, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam are seen by adherents to those faiths, which follow the words, teachings, and revelations of Jesus, Buddha, and Muhammad. In contrast, Shinto appears to confidently assert the fundamental correctness and inherent naturalness of the basic beliefs that are intimately connected with the experiences and history of the Japanese people.

Similarly, Shinto does not have scriptural texts—any body of writings that are seen as especially sacred or divinely inspired. Although extremely significant texts about Shinto (including descriptions of creation stories and the early history of Japan) were composed in the eighth century CE and later, these writings are generally not regarded with quite the same degree of reverence with which Christians, for example, regard the Bible, and with which Muslims regard the Qur'an. Shinto texts such as the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, ca. 712—the oldest surviving text written in Japanese, authored by Ono Yasumaro),[9] the *Nihonshoki* (Chronicles of Japan, ca. 720),[10] the *Manyoshu* (Collection of 10,000 Leaves, ca. 760), and the *Engishiki* (a collection of laws, prayers, and directions for Shinto ritual, composed in the late 10th century) contain mixtures of legends, history, mythology, and poetry. Although these writings can be described as sacred texts for Shinto and are certainly regarded with great esteem, they are not generally seen as divinely inspired.

> Shinto . . . is amazingly slippery and various. It has no doctrine, no consensus of philosophy or theology. It does not have the formidable logical tradition of the Buddhist sects. In fact, it is nonintellectual. Shinto likes names and forms and dislikes description. It appears at times to be without content, while at other times it seems to have caught the purest essentials of religion.[11]

PRINCIPAL BELIEFS AND KEY PRACTICES

The most important and fundamental belief for Shinto involves the existence of *kami.* The word *kami* is often translated as deities, gods, spirits, "but in fact it designates an extremely wide range of spirit-beings together with a host of mysterious and supernatural forces and 'essences.'"[12] Kami reside in, and give energy to, both animate and inanimate objects throughout the universe. The number of kami is immeasurable. Kami are present in natural landscape features, such as trees, rocks, and waterfalls. The souls of deceased humans are believed to become kami after death, and there are particular kami that are especially significant. Chief among these is the sun goddess, Amaterasu (see Plate 31). Other especially important kami are Susanoo (the god of the sea and storms, the brother of Amaterasu), Tsukiyomi (the moon god), Inari (the god of rice and prosperity, who is the most widely venerated of all), and a host of other kami associated with food-gathering and agricultural activities, such as fishing and the harvest. There is also Hachiman, deity of war, victory, and success (derived from a semi-legendary emperor), whose worship is extremely widespread, and Tenjin (an actual ninth-century court figure) who is the patron of scholarship and learning. There are also regional and family or clan deities (*ujigama*). Kami are not necessarily benevolent; there are also negative or malicious forces known as *oni* (demons) and frightening *obake* (ghosts), all of whom are subject to capricious and human-like behavior to a large extent.[13]

> Shinto maintains that human beings are internally related to *kami* and without this relation people would not be what they are. . . . it is in the inherent nature of *kami* to be interdependent and intimately connected with the world, including human beings. . . . the world is *kami*-filled because the world and *kami* are so interdependent as to be incomplete without one another.[14]

Belief in and veneration of kami is the fundamental requirement of Shinto, although, as mentioned, the Shinto–Buddhist coexistence and mutual interplay through the centuries in Japan has resulted in Buddhist deities and enlightened beings (such as Amida, Kannon, and Jizo) being worshiped as kami and in particular Shinto *kami* being regarded and worshiped as enlightened beings (or *bodhisattvas*) by Buddhists. The system that evolved is known as *shimbutsu-shugo* or *honji-suijaku.* The Buddhist deities were understood to be the original forms (*honji*), and the Shinto kami were incarnations, emanations, or traces of these forms. This complex fusion and assimilation is very well illustrated in art examples discussed later. It has been pointed out that "this ability to grow and change with the times is part of the essential genius of Shinto."[15]

Concurrent with the belief in kami and the importance of venerating, pleasing, and petitioning these elemental forces, Shinto also emphasizes the principle of *wa. Wa* can be translated as "benign harmony"—an inherent balance to be maintained in one's personal life and in the world at large. *Wa* involves

harmony between humans, kami, and nature and needs to be—indeed can be—fostered by specific ritual actions as well as general ethical attitudes. These include a reverence for nature and the natural world, the maintenance of "purity" (both in personal life and in ritual contexts), and a respect for one's group, family, and ancestors.

Nevertheless, one especially salient aspect of Shinto, and one that has had a great deal of impact on the history of Japan generally and in the modern period particularly, is the relationship of Shinto to Japanese politics. The primary historical/mythological texts of Shinto (notably, the *Kojiki* and *Nibonshoki,* composed in the eighth century) describe the kami who created the earth during the primordial Age of the Gods. The coupling of the divine spirits Izanagi and Izanami resulted in the birth of the sun goddess, Amaterasu (the most important Shinto deity), and ultimately, it was understood that Amaterasu's earthly descendant (her great-great-grandson, the legendary Jimmu Tenno) became Japan's first emperor in the seventh century BCE. Similarly, Amaterasu's brother, Susanoo, gave birth to the legendary great lord of the country, Okuninushi, the protector of the imperial family. Thus, the imperial ruling class in Japan has long been seen as having divine lineage, and "since the days of Jimmu Tenno the earthly descendants of Amaterasu have ruled Japan as emperors."[16]

Although veneration of the emperor as a divine being (a descendant of Amaterasu) was a traditional Shinto belief, the close relationship between religion and politics was amplified in Japan especially during the Meiji Restoration of imperial power in 1868 and the development of Shrine Shinto. Eighteenth-century scholars (such as Motoori Norinaga) did a great deal to reestablish and promote the emphasis on the imperial cult and the native or indigenous qualities of Shinto as an especially Japanese (versus foreign or imported) belief system. Belief in the divine lineage and veneration of the emperor had always played a role in Shintoism, but it was during the Meiji Restoration that Shintoism became especially closely tied with politics and nationalistic sentiments.[17] When the Emperor Meiji died in 1912, a large shrine in Tokyo was constructed to honor his spirit as kami. The Meiji Shrine is still one of the most-visited of all Shinto shrines. The defeat of Japan in World War II destabilized the political associations of Shinto dramatically, although "State Shinto ideology survives on some level in parts of Japanese society"[18] to the present day, perhaps seen especially at highly politicized monuments such as the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo (memorial to the spirits—*kami*—of the war dead).[19]

TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURAL FORMS

The art and architecture associated with Shinto have a rich history and have undergone many phases and developments through the centuries. Shinto arts have been significantly influenced by Buddhist as well as Taoist art forms, and thus Shinto art and architecture often bear a great resemblance to the art and architectural forms of the other Asian religions with which it has, for the most

part, harmoniously coexisted. There are, however, specific aesthetics and particular forms and styles of art and architecture that can be seen as characteristically Shinto.

Because belief in kami is the fundamental aspect of Shinto, the religious art and architecture of Shinto is concentrated on acknowledging, honoring, and communicating with the kami. This takes place primarily in two contexts: the marking or creation of sacred space and the celebration of religious festivals. In both cases, the aim is to achieve and maintain harmony with the kami.

Sacred Places and Spaces

Kami are believed to reside in nature. Thus, the appreciation and veneration of natural landscape features such as waterfalls, rock formations, forests, mountains, caves, and trees is an essential element in Shintoism. Evidence suggests that the earliest Shinto practices of kami-worship took place outdoors, in nature, with no specific architectural forms associated. This is still reflected today by the fact that Shinto shrines are often located in places of particular natural beauty, and the sacredness of special landscape features (such as trees, mountains, and waterfalls) is often signaled via minimal but highly symbolic means (see Figures 16.3 and 16.4).

The practice of constructing specific buildings in which to honor ancestral spirits dates from the prehistoric period in Japan. The styles of these early house-like "shrines" (wooden buildings constructed in the vernacular style) contributed greatly to the development of later Shinto religious architecture.



Figure 16.3 View of Mount Fuji. Courtesy of Shutterstock.



Figure 16.4 The Wedded Rocks at Futamigaura in Ise Bay. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

The specific religious structures constructed by adherents to the Shinto belief system are commonly termed "shrines" in English translation. However, the inadequacy of this translation has been pointed out by some scholars who have argued that the use of the term "shrine" to describe all Shinto architectural constructions really fails to capture the great variation, diversity, and richness of Shinto forms of architecture.[20] There are many terms in Japanese that are used to describe the diverse types of revered worship-sites in Shintoism—for example, *jinya*, *yashiro*, *miya*, *mori*, and *hokura*—some of which are small-scale and local, and others of which are grand and extensive and deserve to be called "temples" or "temple complexes." Oftentimes, Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are located in close proximity to each other, so we might call these "Shrine-Temple Multiplexes."[21] The term "shrine" (implying an overall diminutive form of architecture) is not a wholly appropriate translation of the several Japanese words for Shinto religious structures that vary widely. "Different words are used in the Japanese language to refer to places of Shinto worship. The type and status of the worship facility determine the particular word used."[22]

It is estimated that there are currently about 100,000 Shinto shrines (of various types) in Japan. Some of these are large-scale complexes located in beautiful landscape settings, and others are small local shrines found in villages and even commonly on rooftops in crowded urban areas.

Although it is important to acknowledge the challenges with terminology-in-translation and with the use of the word "shrine" to describe a diversity of examples, there are some typical features of Shinto shrines that can be seen in both large- and small-scale examples. Traditionally, the sacred area or precinct is signaled by the presence of a symbolic wooden gate or *torii* (see Figures 16.5 and 16.6). Generally, these gates do not have doors but are open constructions of two columns topped by one or two cross beams—the top beam projecting the widest. Sometimes they are actual gates in a fence enclosure surrounding a shrine; often they are freestanding structures. Although traditionally made of wood, they may be constructed with concrete in the modern day. They are often painted red, one of the colors considered sacred to kami.[23]

Other symbolic markers indicating that one is entering a sacred area include *shimenawa* (thick ropes typically woven from rice straw), cloth or paper hangings (*gohei*), and small votive banners on cloth or paper, inscribed with special prayers or requests, which are often attached to fences or twigs stuck in the ground. In the case of a large shrine complex, a ceremonial pathway may lead the visitor through a carefully tended natural landscape, across a pond or a stream, and to a trough or fountain that is always required for the ceremonial washing of hands and mouth (ritual purification) before proceeding further.

A large shrine complex can include a number of buildings. There is always a *honden,* or sanctuary. This is the most sacred area, access to which is often closed to the public. The *honden* contains a symbolic object known as a *shintai.* These vary in form; they can be human-made or natural objects; mirrors



Figure 16.5 The Akino Miyajima Torii. Courtesy of Shutterstock.



Figure 16.6 Kawahara Keiga (ca. 1786–1860), *Visit to a Shinto Temple*, watercolor. The Art Archive/Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden (Leyden)/Gianni Dagli Orti.

are especially common because of their reflective cleanliness and purity. The *shintai* functions as a type of conduit, facilitating object, or "landing site"[24] that assists the kami's appearance, entrance, and visit to the shrine. Separated from the *honden,* Shinto shrine complexes may also have a main hall (or *haiden*) for worshipers. This structure functions as an enclosed area for prayers and other worship services. Seating is often provided in the *haiden*. Food offerings (for example, carefully presented rice, fruit, and sake) to please the kami are a critical Shinto ritual, and an additional building known as a *heiden* (hall of offerings) may be provided for this. Other buildings and structures associated with Shinto shrine complexes may include music halls, dance platforms or stages, offices, treasuries to house sacred and ritual objects, and shops or stalls from which visitors may purchase amulets and wooden prayer boards on which petitions are written. These small prayer boards are often displayed on special racks.

Traditionally, the buildings found in Shinto shrine complexes are constructed of wood, as Buddhist temples in Japan are, as well. Because Buddhism and Shintoism are so closely connected in Japanese history and art, there are many shared stylistic features in architectural forms. The very earliest Shinto shrines, such as at Ise, reveal an aesthetic that places great emphasis on natural materials and simple, clear construction. Typically, the buildings

are plain, rectangular wooden structures with sloping thatched roofs, a roof ridge course often marked by a series of projecting horizontal beams (*katsuogi*), and forked finials (*chigi*) that sprout diagonally upward from the roof at each end of the structure. The basic simplicity of these buildings, their use of natural materials, and their general lack of extraneous decoration reflect the Shinto appreciation for purity, harmony, and directness. Under successive waves of influence from Chinese architectural styles, and in connection with the development of Buddhist art styles, later Shinto architecture exhibits more elements of Chinese design (such as upturned gables) and more elaborate color and decoration. *Torii* remain the characteristic marker of a Shinto space, however, in the same way that pagodas characteristically mark Buddhist spaces or areas.

Religious Festivals

Shinto shrines also provide a focus for highly artistic festivals (*matsuri*) that take place throughout the year.[25] Some Shinto festivals are yearly events overlapping with Buddhist festivals; most are purely local festivals, however, and are painstakingly scheduled by the residents of a village or neighborhood area centered around a shrine.[26] *Matsuri* means "to offer worship,"[27] and the purpose of Shinto *matsuri* is to show devotion to the kami. "During *matsuri*, an extraordinary environment is established in order to capture the attention of the deities and to effect a time of interaction during which the benevolence of the *kami* may be sought for the coming period."[28]

Many forms of Shinto art are produced in conjunction with these festivals, which often involve several days of dances, songs, processions, competitions, games, and activities that are designed to attract and please the kami. These festivals are "mass participatory events . . . [with] throngs of people engaging in celebratory behaviour."[29] The highlight of a Shinto *matsuri* is the procession of the *mikoshi*—a portable wooden shrine that is usually carried on poles (like a litter or ark) by a group of bearers. Depending on the size of the *mikoshi* and the number of people participating, the shrine can be carried by two or four people or as many as one hundred people or more. During the *matsuri*, the kami are invited to temporarily reside in the portable shrine (often via ritual transfer of a sacred object from the permanent shrine), and the procession moves with a jostling, tilting, and shaking motion, believed to give pleasure to the *kami*. Other processional structures, such as decorated wagons with tall wooden wheels (*hikiyama*), boat-shaped floats (*fune*), lanterns (*chochin*), huge multi-storied branches of lanterns (*kanto*), and umbrella-like forms (*kasa*) all play a part in *matsuri*. A notable aspect of *matsuri* is the display and wearing of elaborate and vibrant textiles and costumes. Some of the most impressive, exuberant, and remarkable examples of Japanese textile art are associated with these Shinto festivals. Festivals are frequently illustrated or recorded in art as well.

EXAMPLES

Ise Shrine (ca. 680–Present)

Ise Shrine (Figure 16.7), located on the southeast coast of Japan, is considered to be the most sacred Shinto site and still today serves as a major center for pilgrimage. There are many legends surrounding the foundation of the site that emphasize its importance and direct connections with the sun goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, and the Japanese imperial family. These legends, first recorded in the eighth and early ninth century, explain how the goddess herself chose the site by making her wishes known to the imperial princess in the late first century BCE. Later on, in the late fifth century CE, legends additionally recount that Amaterasu appeared in a dream to the emperor and requested that she be joined by Toyouke no Okami, the goddess of grain, who would provide food for her. Because Amaterasu is understood to be the mythical ancestor of the Japanese imperial family, the shrine complex at Ise has always played an important role in Japanese religion as well as politics.

The shrine complex is very extensive and consists of a number of buildings—the earliest of which were originally constructed by the late seventh century. The complex is divided into two major sections: the Naiku (or Inner Shrine, or Imperial Shrine), devoted to the sun goddess Amaterasu, and the Geku (or Outer Shrine,) dedicated to the grain goddess Toyouke. In addition, there are



Figure 16.7 Ise Shrines, 680–present. Art Resource, NY.

numerous other structures (treasuries, worship halls, ancillary shrines, and administrative buildings) that make up the entire complex. There are about 127 shrines and related structures at Ise today. Additionally and significantly, there is also a series of fences that restrict access to the main sanctuaries to priests only.

The architectural forms of the two major sanctuaries (or *shoden*) at Ise, as well as the majority of other buildings at the site, use construction techniques that appear to reflect native Japanese traditions before the introduction of Buddhist architectural styles. The Ise shrines have thus been lauded as exemplars and prototypes of an essentially Japanese style.[30] They have been "regarded as authentic architectural memorials to a remote past,"[31] and the descriptions and photographic images of Ise have been used to support various aims and claims about the essence of Japan aesthetics and native traditions.[32]

The rectangular sanctuary buildings with their raised, one-room interiors are constructed of poles, beams, and planks of Japanese cypress wood and have distinctive thatched roofs of miscanthus reeds. The buildings have no windows, and their primary function is to serve as sacred spaces to house the powerful spirits of the deities in residence. The sanctuaries of the Naiku and Geku differ slightly, but both have the characteristic forms of beam and plank construction, with projecting ridge beams (*katsuogi*) and forked finials (*chigi*). The exteriors are surrounded by verandahs, and a simple staircase leads up to each building. Although of austere and simple architectural construction, the care and attention to details appear in the metal fittings and plaques found on the exterior of the structures, and especially in the many *suedana*—round ornaments made of painted bronze with flame motifs surrounding them.

An important and somewhat unique tradition at Ise is the periodic rebuilding (*shikinen sengu*) of the main sanctuary structures every 20 years. This has continued, with some periods of significant interruption, to the present day. The complete rebuilding of the sanctuaries is a lengthy and costly undertaking and generally takes about eight years to complete. The structures are rebuilt on empty plots within the two precincts, and when the new sanctuary is complete, the older building is dismantled. Of course all buildings (especially wooden ones) require periodic maintenance, but the complete rebuilding of the Ise shrines (last done in 1993) also serves as a significant and symbolic form of the importance of renewal and purification—values so central to Shinto.

Kasuga Mandara ca. 1300

Kasuga is one of the earliest and most important of Shinto shrines. It was established in the seventh century CE under the patronage of the powerful Fujiwara family and is located in a beautiful park-like setting, inhabited by many deer, at the base of the holy mountain, Mount Mikasa. Closely associated with the nearby Buddhist monastery of Kofukuji, the Kasuga-Kofukuji Shrine-Temple complex was a flourishing art center, specializing—particularly

from the 13th century onward—in the production of paintings illustrating the sacred buildings and surrounding natural environment[33] (see Plate 32).

Such "representations of sanctified realms where identification between the human and the sacred occurs"[34] have a lengthy tradition in Buddhist art. Buddhist examples of cosmic diagrams (or *mandalas*) take many forms. Different styles and types developed in India and China and are associated with the rituals and visualization practices of specific Buddhist sects. The traditionally more visionary and geometrically ordered *mandala* formats are found in Japanese Buddhist art too, but in Japan, the tradition of illustrating specific places (such as the important Shinto shrine complex of Kasuga) involves the significant depiction of recognizable landscape and architectural elements. The term *mandara* (versus *mandala*) may be more appropriately used here. This term reflects Japanese usage from the early 11th century onward to describe paintings that often show a specific site, "recognizable sacred precincts on earth," and that depict "relationships among deities who manifest themselves at these numinous places."[35]

Many Kasuga (as well as Kumano—another significant Shinto shrine complex) *mandara* were produced during the medieval period in Japan. These were designed to give devotees an opportunity to admire, pray before, and also take a virtual pilgrimage to the sites. Often these *mandara* were created for branch shrines associated with, but located at some distance from, the preeminent sacred site.

The example of the Kasuga *mandara* illustrated here is a small hanging scroll created of ink and watercolor on silk, plus gold and silver pigments and gold leaf details. It depicts an aerial, or bird's eye view, of the Kasuga shrine complex at the foot of Mount Mikasa, which is shown at the top of the painting. The landscape features and architectural elements are laid out in the painting not with a view toward strict topographical exactitude, but rather to give viewers an overall sense of the experience of visiting the sacred site. One visually enters the *torii* gates (at the bottom of the painting) and progresses upward through the landscape filled with trees, sacred deer, and mist. The deer are a special feature of Kasuga and are frequently depicted in art. It is believed that the Kasuga kami arrived to the site riding on deer and that the deer serve as messengers to the kami. They roam freely at the site today. The path, rendered in gold and silver pigments, meanders through the park until the viewer reaches the shrine buildings themselves. The painting depicts the form and layout of the shrine complex as per its 14th-century date. At that point, the shrine complex had grown significantly and consisted of a variety of different structures. Within the main complex, the visitor/viewer can clearly see four separate shrine buildings (*honden*—with characteristic details such as the forked finials, *chigi*) lined up in a row and surrounded by a roofed corridor with a gate and courtyard. These shrines are for the four major Shinto kami worshiped at this site. One additional or subsidiary shrine for the *wakamiya kami* (the youthful offspring of the main kami, a shrine to

whom was added to the complex in the 12th century) is placed to the right of the other shrines.

This view of the shrine complex at Kasuga (Figure 16.8) is visually enticing and informative; however, the viewer's eye is constantly drawn to the top of the painting where an orb filled with deities is shown. These figures, who are depicted in a sphere floating above Mount Mikasa, hover over the site in a way that not only is visually intriguing but that also demonstrates the Buddhist–Shinto interplay in ways that non-visual texts really cannot. There are five Buddhist deities depicted in the orb who are understood to be the *honji* (original forms) of the five Shinto *kami* worshiped at the site. Because the Shinto *kami* worshiped at Kasuga are understood to be *suijaku* (emanations, traces, or incarnations) of various Buddhas, this visual example expresses this perfectly and in a direct manner. Other examples of Kasuga *mandara* similarly show the Buddhist deities in relationship to the Shinto kami with whom they are paired.[36] This *honji suijaku* relationship of original forms and their emanations is a significant aspect of the continued Shinto/ Buddhist coordination.

> The systematic pairing of all the major *kami* did not occur until the eleventh century. While this unique synthesis seems, in theory, to have placed the Shinto *kami*



Figure 16.8 Kasuga Shrine *mandara*, ca. 1300, Kamakura period, hanging scroll, detail showing Buddhist deities. The Art Archive / Sylvan Barnet and William Burto Collection.

> on a lower plane than the Buddhist deities, in actual practice the development of the *honji suijaku* in no way diminished their status; on the contrary, it vastly enriched the *kami's* radius of religious and cultic connotations.[37]

The *honji suijaku* "interpretation became a religion of its own, which was expressed most clearly in art."[38] In many ways, the visual examples "offer the most compelling examples of the complex syncretism—doctrinal, ritual, visual, and literary—characteristic of the Japanese religion as a whole."[39]

Deified Princess Nakatsu-Hime, Ninth Century

This wooden sculpture (Figure 16.9) is part of a famous triad of images located in the Hachiman shrine of the Yakushi-ji Temple complex in Nara. Three-dimensional figural sculptures for use in shrines, such as this example, began to be produced in Japan probably by the eighth century, and certainly under the influence of Buddhism with its developed traditions of figural arts and wood carving. The worship of Hachiman (deity of war, victory, and success) has a long history in Japan. The origins of the Hachiman cult are partially based on the semi-legendary Emperor Ojin of the third century CE. Hachiman is among the most revered of the kami, evoked for his enormous strength, power, and ability to deal with crises. When the large Buddhist temple complex of the Todai-ji was constructed in Nara in the eighth century, the support of Hachiman was evoked, and he became regarded as the protector and tutelary deity of Todai-ji in 749. Hachiman's rise to prominence and his earliest representations in the visual arts date to this period.[40] Hachiman was, of course, considered to be a major Buddhist *bodhisattva* as well, typical of Shinto–Buddhist synthesis.



Figure 16.9 Wood sculpture of the deified Princess Nakatsu-hime, ninth century. Hachimangu Shrine, Nara, Japan. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

In art, Hachiman often appears in the guise of a monk or scholar and is often accompanied by other figures who represent female companions of the Emperor Ojin, such as

the deified Empress Jingu and the Princess-Goddess Nakatsu-hime. In this example, the Princess-Goddess is seated in a dignified pose and is wearing robes and a hairstyle typical of the imperial court. The bulky, but relatively small, sculpture is carved from a single block of wood and includes painted details of flesh-colored skin, facial features, and garments decorated with green and red details. The clothing and hairstyle are typical of imperial fashion of the ninth century; this reasserts the close connection of Shinto kami with the imperial family and also reflects the important role of female deities in Shinto generally. As a whole the Hachiman triad represents an extremely important early example of the representation of Shinto kami in human form, as well as an early step in the visual and theological merging and overlap of Buddhist and Shinto deities and art styles.

NOTES

1. Ian Reader, *The Simple Guide to Shinto* (Folkestone, England: Global Books, 1998), 33.
2. C. Scott Littleton, *Shinto: Origins, Rituals, Festivals, Spirits, Sacred Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17.
3. Thomas Kasulis, *Shinto: The Way Home* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 101.
4. Kasulis, 130.
5. Kasulis, 135.
6. Allan Grapard, “Japan’s Ignored Cultural Revolution: The Separation of Shinto and Buddhist Divinities in Meiji (‘*Shimbutsu Bunri*’) and a Case Study: Tonomine,” *History of Religions* 23, no. 3 (1984): 245.
7. Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3.
8. Littleton, 11.
9. Daniel L. Philippi, trans., *Kojiki* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).
10. W.G. Aston, trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 687* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956; originally published in 1896).
11. Susan Tyler, *The Cult of Kasuga Seen through Its Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Center for Japanese Studies, 1992), 78.
12. Littleton, 24.
13. “Like the gods of Greek myths, the Japanese *kami* may copulate and procreate, argue, fight, have ambitions, seek to be the most important deity, and occasionally sulk when they do not get their way. They are earthy, and manifest a bawdy humour, enjoy life, get drunk and generally behave in a very humanesque way. They may also exhibit a potential for malevolence and the capacity to be dangerous and harmful to life.” Reader, 42.
14. Kasulis, 17.
15. Littleton, 33.
16. Littleton, 30.
17. Helen Hardacre, “Creating State Shinto: The Great Promulgation Campaign and the New Religions,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 29–63.
18. Kasulis, 147.

19. John Nelson, "Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (2003): 443–67.

20. Peter Metevelis, "Shinto Shrines or Shinto Temples?" *Asian Folklore Studies* 53, no. 2 (1994): 337–45.

21. Allan Grapard, "Institution, Ritual, and Ideology: The Twenty-Two Shrine-Temple Multiplexes of Heian Japan," *History of Religions* 27, no. 3 (1988): 246–69.

22. Metevelis, 338.

23. Blue (or green), yellow, red, white, and black (or purple) are considered the five sacred colors. This is "a scheme originating in early Indian and Taoist aesthetics, which persists to the present time in cultures throughout Asia." Gloria Granz Gonick, *Matsuri! Japanese Festival Arts* (Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles, Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2002), 46.

24. Allan Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions," *History of Religions* 21, no. 3 (February 1982): 197.

25. The bibliography on Matsuri is extensive. An excellent colorful introduction is Hiroyuki Ozawa, *The Great Festivals of Japan: Spectacle and Spirit* (New York: Kodansha America, 1999).

26. C. Scott Littleton, "The Organization and Management of a Tokyo Shinto Shrine Festival," *Ethnology* 25, no. 3 (1986): 195–202.

27. Gonick, 25.

28. Gonick, 25.

29. Reader, 20.

30. Kenzo Tange and Noboru Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1965).

31. Yasutada Watanabe, *Shinto Art: Ise and Izumo Shrines* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974), 14.

32. Jonathan Reynolds, "Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (2001): 316–41.

33. See Tyler, *The Cult of Kasuga*.

34. Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 1.

35. Ten Grotenhuis, 143.

36. "In the center of the group sits the historical buddha Sakyamuni, the *honji* of Takemikazuchi of the first Kasuga sanctuary. Above Sakyamuni appears Yakushi, the *honji* of Futsunushi of the second Kasuga sanctuary. To the right of Sakyamuni sits Jizo, the *honji* of Ame no koyane of the third Kasuga sanctuary. To the left of Sayamuni appears the eleven-headed Kannon, the *honji* of Himegami of the fourth Kasuga sanctuary. Just below Sakyamuni sits the bodhisattva Monju, the *honji* of the Kasuga wakamiya." Ten Grotenhuis, 153.

37. Haruki Kageyama and Christine Guth Kanda, *Shinto Arts: Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan* (New York: Japan Society, 1976), 18.

38. Tyler, 75.

39. Ten Grotenhuis, 184.

40. Christine Guth Kanda, "Kaikei's Statue of Hachiman in Todai-ji," *Artibus Asiae* 43, no. 3 (1981–82): 190–208; and Christine Guth Kanda, *Shinzo: Hachiman Imagery and Its Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1985).

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Conclusion

These volumes opened with a quote from the influential world leader and visionary Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) in which he expressed his belief that "a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty."[1] In the same 1926 article, Gandhi, a devout Hindu, went on to say that his interest in and study of the world's religions had enriched his life and perspective in immeasurable ways. This has humbly been the goal of these volumes—not only to provide information about the world's religions but also to promote a respectful and enriching awareness of the diversity of faiths and their visual forms.

Many different forms of religious art have been considered in these volumes, ranging from the small scale to the monumental, from the deliberately ephemeral to the decidedly enduring. Readers will have found that many quite well-known works of religious art and architecture have been described yet again in these volumes. These include several of the most familiar monuments customarily considered to be among the greatest artistic accomplishments of humankind. Any overall survey of the world's religious art necessarily needs to include coverage of the impressive temples of ancient Egypt, the soaring cathedrals of medieval Europe, and the richly decorated monuments of Hindu architecture, for example. Studies of the world's religious art will necessarily also include many examples of painting and sculpture, such as images of holy figures, pictorial scenes representing important historical or mythological events, and numerous other detailed or abbreviated visual symbols developed and used by different faith traditions to teach and inspire. This survey thus discussed many examples of religious imagery and symbolism, from Christian images of Mary and Jesus to the devotional, meditative, and complex imagery employed in Tibetan Buddhist practices.

Much attention was given in this study also to the visible forms of religious expression that do not fall so neatly or comfortably into the categories of architecture, painting, and sculpture—at least in their permanent forms. Readers will thus have encountered, in these volumes, many examples of more temporary forms of religious visual expression, forms of art created for religious purposes but that are designed to serve their powerful functions on a short-term basis. For example, the images and complex traditions of symbols used in Navajo sand paintings, Melanesian *malagan* sculptures, and the many examples of African masking and dance ceremonies all serve to create sacred space and enact religious events in relatively temporary forms as well.

The materials discussed in these volumes have also represented an enormous geographic and chronological range, with selections made from a sweeping range of dates, chosen from around the world. Readers may thus have found a rather dizzying range of materials included, from prehistory to the modern period. Of course, the individual chapters devoted to specific religions of the world have been carefully designed to provide basic historical background information, summaries of the central beliefs of currently practiced religions, information about what is, at least, surmised about the core beliefs of ancient and prehistoric peoples, and introductions to the traditional arts and visual expressions associated with these beliefs. Each chapter might thus be read alone as a self-sufficient unit, and all chapters are equipped with ample suggestions for additional reading.

However, the overall goal of this study has not been to discuss and present the world's religions and their visual manifestations as simply a series of disparate and unrelated phenomena. Sacred art has been described as "the bridge between the material and spiritual worlds . . . inseparable from the particular religion to which it is connected."[2] Accordingly, an understanding of the world's religious art requires knowledge of the unique features of specific faith systems. At the same time, however, all religious art, in all of its celebrated diversity and uniqueness, serves shared purposes. The forms of art may be different indeed, but the creation and use of religious art, generally, serves to unify rather than divide world cultures. It is hoped that attentive readers will find many more connections between the world's religions and their arts than strange or discomforting divergences between them. Careful study and the development of visual sensitivity to diverse faith traditions requires a willingness to see that religious art, in all its forms, serves to provide a crucial and shared entranceway into understanding others and ourselves.

Such understanding is also an ongoing process, continually enlivened by the fact that, for example, new archaeological discoveries are perpetually being made, and new theories about human history and cultures continue to be proposed.[3] Barely a week passes now without the announcement of major and exciting new archaeological finds from around the globe.[4] Many of these ongoing discoveries not only challenge the traditional parameters and chronological dating ranges for the oldest evidence of human activities on earth, but also

serve to greatly expand the growing range of material data associated with the world's belief systems, their practices, and their visual expressions.

The religions of the world have continued to grow, evolve, and expand also. Newer forms of artistic expression as well as reinterpretations of older visual traditions continually demonstrate the significance and vitality of the world's religions and their diverse, vibrant, and related forms of art. It is hoped that the wide-ranging examples and modes discussed in these volumes have provided readers with an increased awareness of the diversity as well as the unity in the world's faith traditions and that study of the world religions will, as per Gandhi, continue to be an enriching experience.

NOTES

1. Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India,* September 2, 1926.
2. Seyyed Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 68.
3. Brian Fagan, ed. *Discovery! Unearthing the New Treasures of Archaeology* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007).
4. Updates are constantly available on Web sites such as *Science Daily,* http://www.sciencedaily.com, and *Archaeology,* http://www.archaeology.org/.

Selected Bibliography

The Bibliography and Further Reading suggestions found at the conclusion of each chapter include general works as well as specialized studies of specific relevance for the materials covered in the individual chapters. The following list represents a selection of general works of overall interest for the study of the art and architecture of the world's religions.

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Web Resources

There are abundant resources easily accessible on the World Wide Web relevant for all areas of this study. Many major museums have excellent Web sites that include information on various world cultures, time lines of art history, and specific works of art. The following is simply a sampling of some of the resources available.

Archaeology: http://www.archaeology.org
Art History Resources on the Web: http://witcombe.sbc.edu/
The British Museum, London: http://www.britishmuseum.org
Christian Iconography: http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/
Christus Rex: http://www.christusrex.org/
The Internet Sacred Text Archive: http://www.sacred-texts.com/
The Labyrinth: Resources for Medieval Studies: http://labyrinth.georgetown.edu/
The Louvre Museum, Paris: http://www.louvre.fr
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: http://www.metmuseum.org/
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.: http://www.nga.gov
Religion On Line: http://www.religion-online.org/
Religious Resources: http://www.religiousresources.org/
Sacred Destinations: http://www.sacred-destinations.com/
Virtual Religion Index: http://www.virtualreligion.net

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About the Author

LESLIE ROSS is Professor and Chair of Art History, Dominican University of California. She is the author of *Artists of the Middle Ages* (Greenwood 2003), *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Greenwood 1996), and *Text, Image, Message: Saints in Medieval Manuscript Illustrations* (Greenwood 1994).



Plate 1 Cave painting, Lascaux, France ca. 15,000–13,000 BCE. Art Resource, NY.



Plate 2 Stonehenge, Wiltshire, England, ca. 3000–1500 BCE. 2009 Jupiterimages Corporation.



Plate 3 Statues of Worshipers from Eshnunna, ca. 2700 BCE. Baghdad: Iraq Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 4 The Warka Vase, ca. 3500–3000 BCE. Baghdad: Iraq Museum. Scala / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 5 Pectoral of Tutankhamun, ca. 1336–1327 BCE. Cairo: Egyptian Museum. Scala / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 6 The *Papyrus of Ani* (*Book of the Dead*), ca. 1275–1250 BCE. London: British Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 7 Pantheon, Rome, Italy, interior, ca. 125 CE. 2009 Jupiterimages Corporation.

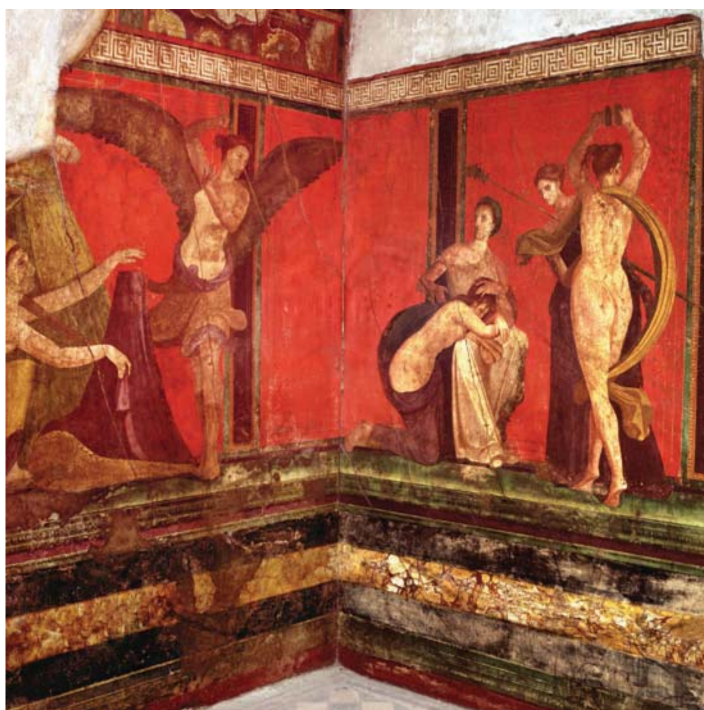


Plate 8 Frescoes from the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy, ca. 60–50 BCE. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 9 Lintel 24 from Structure 23, Yaxchilán, Mexico, ca. 725 CE, Lady Xoc and Shield Jaguar II. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 10 The Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, 15th century CE. Liverpool, England: World Museum M 12014. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 11 Kwakiutl Crooked-Beak-of-Heaven Mask. Victoria, Canada: Provincial Museum. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

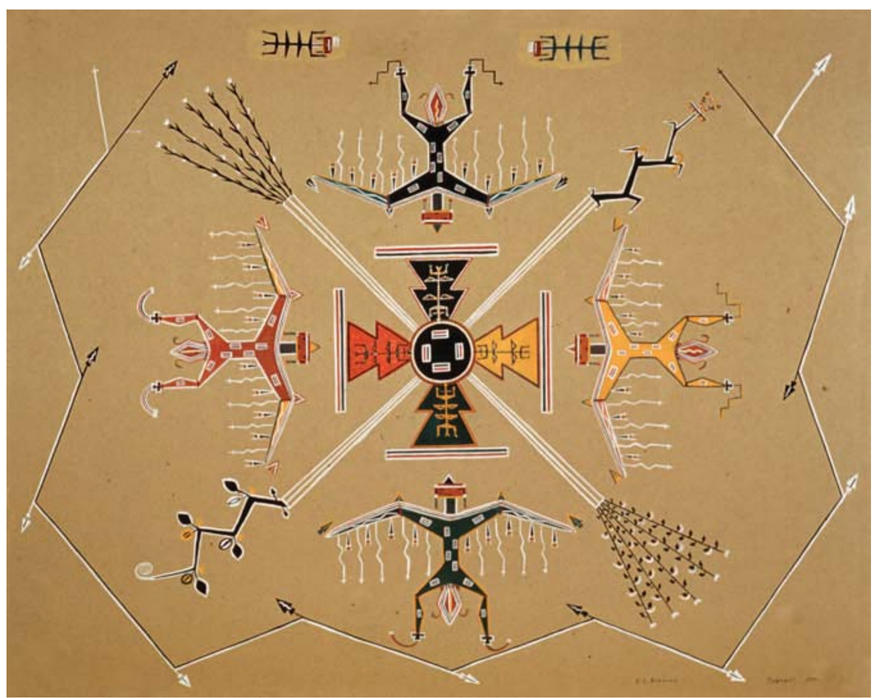


Plate 12 Navajo Shooting Way Chant, sandpainting textile, 20th century. The Art Archive / Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Santa Fe, New Mexico.



Plate 13 Spirit Board (*hohao*), late 19th to early 20th century, Papua New Guinea. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 14 Te Hau-Ki-Turanga, Maori meeting house, 1842. Wellington, New Zealand: National Museum of New Zealand. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 15 Suku helmet mask, wood, Democratic Republic of Congo. The Art Archive / Paris: Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens / Gianni Dagli Orti.



Plate 16 Kongo *Nkisi Nkondi* figure, wood and metal, late 19th century, Democratic Republic of Congo. London: The Trustees of The British Museum / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 17 Synagogue at Dura Europos, interior, mid-third century CE. Replica, Tel Aviv, Israel: Museum of the Diaspora. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 18 The "Golden Haggadah," ca. 1320, Northern Spain. London: British Library Ms Add 27210, ff. 4v-5. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

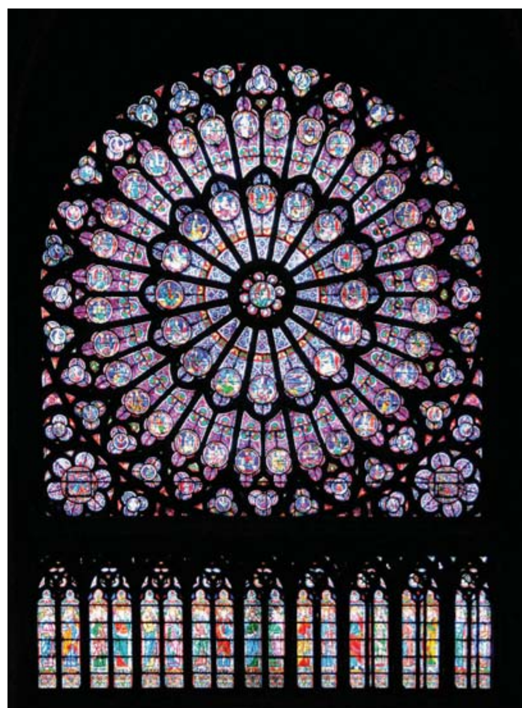


Plate 19 Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France, north transept rose window, 13th century. Courtesy of Shutterstock.

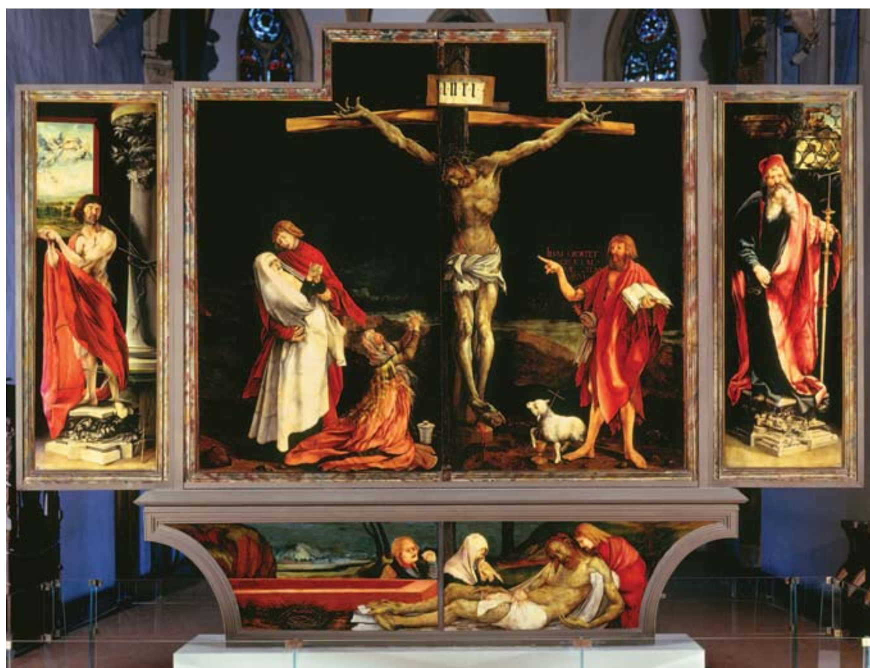


Plate 20 Matthias Grunewald, *The Isenheim Altarpiece*, crucifixion panel, ca. 1510–15. Colmar: Musée d'Unterlinden. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

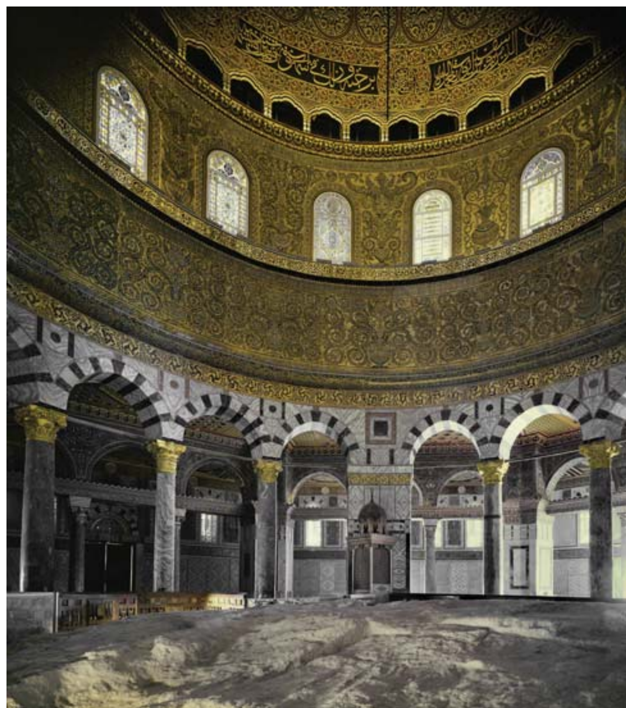


Plate 21 The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Israel, begun 691, interior. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 22 The Ascent of Muhammad, manuscript illustration attributed to Sultan-Muhammad in a *Khamsa* of Nizami, 1539–43, Tabriz. London: British Library Ms Or 2265, f. 195. Art Resource, NY.



Plate 23 Shiva Nataraja, bronze sculpture, 11th to 12th century, southern India. The Art Archive / Musée Guimet Paris / Gianni Dagli Orti.



Plate 24 Krishna and Radha, miniature painting, mid-18th century, Kishengarh, Rajasthan, India. Victoria & Albert Museum, IS 40-1980, London / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 25 Avalokiteshvara, wood, 11th to 12th century, China. London: British Museum. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 26 Satchakravarti Samvara Mandala, thangka, 15th century, Tibet. The Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 27 *Divine Immortals of the Five Paths and Transcendents Who Have Obtained the Tao,* 1454, hanging scroll. Paris: Musée Guimet. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 28 Jade plaque of a Taoist Paradise, 17th century. Bath, England: Museum of East Asian Art. HIP / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 29 The Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Imperial City, Beijing, China, early 15th century. Vanni / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 30 Zhu Bang, Officials in front of the Forbidden City, ca. 1500, Ming Dynasty, silk painting. The Art Archive / British Museum, London.



Plate 31 Utagawa Kunisada (1785–1864), *Amaterasu, Shinto Goddess of the Sun*, woodblock print, ca. 1860. Victoria & Albert Museum, London / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 32 Kasuga Shrine *mandara,* ca. 1300, Kamakura period, hanging scroll. The Art Archive / Sylvan Barnet and William Burto Collection.